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NORSE 'TALES

BY

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'REST AND UNREST,' 'LIGHT AND TWILIGHT,'
'LIFE OF RICHARD JEFFERIES,'
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TORONTO AND MELBOURNE

PREFACE

THESE stories are taken from poems in the Old Norse tongue. They are the work of men who were perhaps for the most part Christians, living in the ninth and tenth centuries amidst a still keen aroma and tradition of Paganism. Their names have been lost, their poems confused and mutilated, in the course of a thousand years. Even the land where they wrote is unknown, and scholars have tried to discover it from the nature of the landscape and the conditions of life mentioned in the poems. For example, the editors of the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* ask, 'Where could those curious mythologic fancies, which created Valhalla, and made of Odin a heavenly Charlemagne, which dreamed, like Cædmon, of the Rood as a tree that spread through the worlds, which pictured the final Doom as near, and nursed visions of an everlasting peace, holier even than Cynewulf's Phoenix figures—where could such ideas as these, alien as they are to the old Teutonic religion and ritual and thought, have been better fostered than in the British Isles, at a time when the Irish Church, with her fervent faith, her weird and wild imaginings, and curious half-Eastern legends, was impressing the poetic mind on one side, while the rich and splendid court of Eadgar or Canute would stimulate it on the other?' For the dates of the poems certainly fall within the period when the Northmen were plundering or colonizing the British and Irish coasts, and the Irish influence on the poets,

as well as some Irish blood in their veins, seems unquestionable.

These tall, fair-haired Norsemen or Northmen were cousins of the Saxon conquerors of Britain, and followed soon after them in a wilder career of conquest. They fought and won treasure or land in every part of the West that could be reached by sea. Before the end of the eighth century they first reached our islands, and at the end of the twelfth were still raiding them. What the horse was to the Huns, said Cardinal Newman, the ship was to the Norsemen. From the glens and fiords of Scandinavia they scattered themselves on all the coasts of the Atlantic and the North Sea, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, instigated by poverty, civil war, tyranny, or famine, at home, and a spirit of adventure. They fought Christians and Moslems. They settled in France, in Sicily, in Ireland, in Iceland, and Greenland. Some of them in the eleventh century sailed far into the south and discovered a country where the vine grew wild, and they called it Wineland and brought home from it grapes and vine wood. Others sought for Wineland in vain, and no one can say what land it was. The Norsemen gave England kings like Sweyn and Canute. They are remembered in Irish tales as the men of Lochlann. They burned the cathedral at St. David's. Their writing upon the lion at the entrance to the arsenal at Venice can be seen to-day. Their blood is in the soil and in the veins of all the nations of the West.

The tales in this book were told by their poets in the years of their triumph, in the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, when the heroes in the tales were so real to them that one of their great men, Olaf the White, who was king at Dublin, was said to be descended

from Sigurd and Brynhild. But already the tales were old, some unfathomably old. 'As one goes through the poems one is ever and anon face to face with a myth of the most childish and barbaric type—the world a giant, slain by the gods, who made heaven out of his skull, sun and moon from his eyes, earth out of his flesh, ocean out of his blood, clouds out of his brains, dwarfs out of the worms that bred in his body, and so on—a story that carries one back to pre-Aryan days, and must, one would fancy, have rather suited the imagination of the Ivernian thrall than of his Celtic lord, or his Scandinavian conqueror.

'Another almost as archaic is the early myth of the holy cow—firstborn of things, a figure common to Indian and Teutonic fancy. But side by side with these old outcrops of primæval granite rock come the latest stratum, a wholly new system of beliefs, coloured through and through with Christian ideas—a heaven with a supreme God, angels, demons, a Holy Tree, a Hell, and a Doomsday. . . .'

The Gods in these poems still bear the title of Gods, unlike those in the Celtic stories. Yet they are not always more godlike. True, they are said to be all but omnipotent and all but immortal. At the same time one poem shows a mighty God unable to punish an impudent ferryman because the fellow is on the opposite side of a river.

Most of the stories of the Gods in these anonymous and fragmentary poems were gradually collected and paraphrased in a series of prose stories, interspersed with quotations from the poems. This collection, made in the thirteenth century by Snorri Sturleson, is known as the Prose Edda or Younger Edda, to distinguish it from the original group of poems called the Edda, or the Elder or

Poetic Edda. The first part of this book is a rearrangement of the Prose Edda, with several additional stories and considerable amplification of the dialogue-form and the character of Gangler. These myths do not represent, so far as we know, the whole of the belief of pagan Norsemen, nor is it likely that any one Norseman or group of Norsemen ever worshipped all those Gods together or kept in their mind a system such as the Prose Edda suggests. The collection is no more than a compilation of all that could be found, or all that was interesting when found, by a learned Christian, centuries after the conversion of the Norsemen.

The stories of the heroes in the second part of this book are taken from poems written in the same great period. They also are old stories. The different poets tell them in their own ways, one often inventing or presenting scenes and characters incompatible with those in another's poem. All of these stories of Sigmund, Helgi, and Sigurd are to be found—text, translations, notes, and introductions—in the '*Corpus Poeticum Boreale* (The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the earliest times to the thirteenth century)', edited by Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell.

As many of the mythological stories were collected in the Prose Edda, so were the heroic in the prose story of the family of King Volsung, called 'Volsunga Saga.' The heroic tales are also used, much changed and amplified, by the anonymous German poet of the Nibelungen Lied, who inspired the most famous of the music dramas of Wagner. Both the early poems and the 'Volsunga Saga' have been used in this second part.

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THE GODS

I

THE MAKING OF THE WORLDS, OF GODS, AND OF GIANTS

LONG ago, in Iceland, there was a king named Gangler who was famous for wisdom and for magic, and there were few things which he could not understand. One thing alone always astonished him, and that was the fact that whatever the Gods willed came to pass. He did not know whether this was due to their own great wisdom or to that of some even mightier Gods whom perhaps they themselves worshipped as men did them. This question returned to his mind again and again, even when he was old.

One day while the king was thinking about this power of the Gods he rode far away from his palace without looking at the road, and leaving his horse, which was a new one, to take him wherever it pleased. For he was thinking very hard. He did not know even that he was hungry. He did not know that what he was seeing was not the things around him, but those in his own brain. He was thinking about the Gods and their palace of Asgard, and he could see them as plain as his own warriors and his own house; in fact the Gods were very much like his warriors, and the palace of Asgard very much like his house, except that they were larger and looked as if they must last for ever. It was not until the horse stumbled that he saw anything else but Gods

and Asgard. He slid gently off on to the ground, and the young horse, glad to be free, walked on, turned round, and galloped away.

As Gangler followed the horse with an indifferent eye he saw that he was far up on the side of a stony mountain. It seemed as huge as the sky, especially as the pale stones scattered about it resembled the flocks of white clouds when those flocks are at their smallest and highest in the blue. Though he had never before been on this mountain or any like it, he was in no way surprised or alarmed. It was, in fact, just such a mountain as he had been seeing with his mind's eye for some time. At the top of it was a palace such as he imagined the Gods' palace of Asgard to be. With untired step he went on up the slope towards it. It did not seem to him a wonderful thing that he should have come in this short time to Asgard.

The first thing he saw was a mansion huge as a hill, roofed with golden shields instead of tiles; and a man stood at the entrance tossing up and catching seven swords to amuse himself.

'What is your name?' said the man. 'Gangler,' said he; 'I have come a long way and should be glad of a night's lodging. Pray tell me whose house this is.' 'It is the king's,' said the man, and led him into the hall. He saw room after room, and many people in them, some drinking, some at play, others fighting. He went without fear, yet very carefully, through the crowd, from room to room, until he came to one where he saw three thrones one above the other, and three crowned men like brothers sitting on the thrones. 'Who are these?' asked Gangler. 'The one on the lowest throne is a king, and his name is Har; the second is equal to him, and is called Jafnhar; the highest is Thridi, and he also is

a king.' Now Har himself spoke to Gangler, asking his errand and telling him that all strangers were welcome to eat and drink in his hall. 'But first,' said Gangler, 'I should be glad to know if there is any one here famous for wisdom.' Har smiled: 'Unless you show yourself the wisest, O man, I fear you may not return in safety. Stand below, and here sits one who will be able to answer your questions.'

Gangler bent down before the lowest of the thrones and began to ask his questions.

'Who is the first or eldest of the Gods?' he asked.

'All-Father,' answered Har, in a voice like thunder, 'but he has twelve names.'

'Where is this God? what is his power, and what are his works?'

'He has been from the beginning,' answered Har, 'he reigns everywhere: all things obey him.'

And Jafnhar said in a voice like the sea: 'He made heaven and earth and air, and all that dwells in them.'

Thridi also spoke, and his voice was like wind in the forest: 'He made man, and gave him a soul that cannot die.'

'But where,' asked Gangler, 'where was this God before he made heaven and earth and air?'

'He was with the Frost Giants,' said Har.

'And what was before that?' continued Gangler.

'In the beginning,' said Har, 'there was no earth, no sea, and no heavens. There was no grass; there was nothing but a yawning chasm such as no man can imagine and such as would make the Gods dizzy even to think of.'

'Long before the earth,' said Jafnhar, 'a cloud world was made, called Niflheim, a cold world of everlasting fog, rain, and sleet.'

At these words Gangler felt himself upon a ship, as once he was in his younger days, sailing over an unknown sea after a storm. He saw before him the dim rocks and the dim marshland on the shore of an island where he could find no men, and nothing alive but sea-birds all crying together as they flew round about in the mist. It was between a wet autumn and a bitter winter. The coast of that uninhabited island seen through the sea-spray, the mist, and the low grey clouds must have been like Niflheim. He remembered yet another scene. He had just stepped out of his house after a night of rain and wind. The rain and the wind had beaten round the walls all night, so that as he lay awake, the only man awake in his hall, he seemed to be on a ship. And as he stepped out in the morning he thought at first that he was in the middle of the sea. Below him was the steep hill on the top of which stood his house, but the hill was blotted out by mist. Through the mist he could see mountains which he had never seen before, but either they, or he and the house, were moving. He dared not take another step lest he should fall into that strange sea. Then as he stood still thinking, he saw that the mountains were clouds. His house and the little piece of ground where he was standing seemed to be all that was left of the earth. The night's storm had washed away all the rest, and there he was shipwrecked in a sea of clouds and mist, rocking and swirling round about. This sea must have been like Niflheim.

'But before Niflheim,' said Thridi, not noticing Gangler, 'there was a world in the south called Muspellheim. It is a flaming and burning world, too bright and too hot for any one, man or god, who was not born there. It is guarded by one with a flaming sword seated

at its border. His name is Surtur, and at the end of the world he will go forth with his flaming sword and harry and overcome the Gods and burn the world.'

'Tell me more,' said Gangler, 'of the chasm between this burning world and Niflheim.'

Thridi answered him: 'One half of the chasm was fog and frost from Niflheim, the other bright because of the sparks and flakes of fire of Muspellheim; and in the middle part the frost was melted and the drops of the vapour rising from it grew into the shape of a man. This was Ymir, the ancestor of all the Frost Giants.'

'Where did he live?' asked Gangler, 'and how did he live?'

'A cow also was made out of the drops of the melted frost,' said Har, 'and four rivers of milk flowed from her teats, and Ymir lived on the milk.'

'What did the cow feed on?'

'The cow fed on the salty hoar-frost that she licked from the stones. At the end of the first day hair like a man's appeared on the stone that she had licked; at the end of the second there was a man's head; on the third the complete likeness of a man. He was fair to see, big and strong, and his name was Buri. He begot a son named Bor. This son begot three sons, Odin, Wili, and Wé. These were Gods.'

'And how did the sons of Ymir agree with the sons of Bor?'

'The sons of Bor,' said Har, 'slew the Giant Ymir, and his blood drowned all his children except one called Bergelmi, who saved himself and his wife in an ark. The gods made the earth out of Ymir's body in the midst of the chasm. His flesh was the land, his bones the mountains, his blood the sea.'

Here Jafnhar spoke: 'The blood ran out of his

wounds in a great ring encircling the earth. On the shore of this ocean dwell the Giants.'

'Ymir's skull,' said Thrídi, 'made the heavens above the earth. They set a Dwarf at each of the four quarters, North, South, East, West. With the sparks and flakes of fire scattered from Muspellheim they made stars to move in the heavens, to give light, and to mark the days and nights, spring and summer, autumn and winter.'

'Do the Giants not seek revenge?'

'They are kept out by a great wall,' said Har. 'Inside this wall is Midgard, the abode of men.'

'But where did men come from to dwell in Midgard?'

'As they were walking on the sea-shore, these sons of Bor found two trees, and taking them up made them into men. Odin gave them breath and life, Wili gave them the power to know and to move, Wé gave them speech, hearing, and sight. They gave them also clothes and names. The man was called Ash and the woman Elma, and these two were the first parents of all mankind living in Midgard. Then the Gods made an earthly city for themselves called Asgard, in the centre of Midgard but high above the homes of men. Highest of all in Asgard is the solitary seat of Odin, called Lidskialf. From there he can see all the world and all that men are doing therein. One of Odin's names is King of Lidskialf. Odin and Frigga, his wife, are parents of all the Gods. Rightly, therefore, is Odin named All-Father.'

For a little time Gangler was silent. Then suddenly he asked: 'What is Night?'

'Night,' said Har, 'is a Giant's daughter, and like all of them she is dark. She married one of the Gods, and they had a son whose name was Day. This child

was as bright and beautiful as his father. Odin took him and his mother Night, and gave them two chariots and two horses, and gave them the heavens to drive in, first one, and then the other. Night's horse is Rimfaxi; when he has run his course he stands still, champing the bit; his mouth is covered with foam and this falls to the earth, where men call it dew. Skinfaxi is Day's horse, and as he runs light is shaken out of his mane over earth and the heavens.'

'And who guides the sun and the moon?'

'Once there was a man who had two children so beautiful that he called them Sun and Moon. This angered the Gods, and they snatched up the two children and set them in the cars of the sun and moon to guide them across the sky for ever—until Ragnarok.'

Gangler had never heard the word Ragnarok. If he thought at all about it, he supposed it was only a muttering, an oath of some sort, in the throat of Ilar. 'Why,' he asked, 'does the sun always go on? It is as if she were flying in fear from some one.'

'She is in fear. Some one is pursuing her, and he is not far behind.'

'Who is it?'

'A wolf named Skoll, and one day he will catch her and devour her. Another one named Hati follows the moon and one day will devour him. They are two of the children of the old giantess living in Iron Wood on the east of Midgard. She has many children.'

Gangler thought for a little while of Iron Wood, and an old Giantess with a beard there in the darkness, and a herd of her children who were wolves, some of them running out from under the trees of Iron Wood to look at Midgard. Gangler had never seen Iron Wood, but when Har spoke of it he saw clearly the edge of a

great wood. He was hunting a bear, and had left all his companions far behind; and it was the end of a winter's day. The bear had gone into that wood, and though he was not afraid yet he stood still, leaning upon his spear and looking at the wood. The trees were oak-trees, twisted, bare and black, and he could not see far into the wood. All was black except one tiny blot of orange on a low branch of one oak-tree. All was silent except one tiny song which came from that blot of orange. It was a robin singing, and he stood watching it. Nothing was moving inside the wood. Suddenly the light was gone, and the robin turned, flitted, and was silent. He watched for it, but in vain. Long after he had ceased to expect the bird or the song, he remained standing still with his eyes towards the forest of black oaks. It was useless now to follow the bear. Slowly he turned back and wearily retraced his steps, so that not until the night was half gone did he enter his house. Several times afterwards he turned the hunt that way in the hope of finding the forest and going into it. But he never could. Years went by, and he forgot the forest. Now he remembered it, and shuddered at the thought of the old Giantess and her wolf children that would some day devour the sun and the moon. It seemed to him that the oak forest where the bear had disappeared was Iron Wood.

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II

HEAVEN AND EARTH; GODS, DWARFS, AND ELVES

WHEN he had come back from this wandering of his mind, Gangler tried to hide his thoughts by asking :

‘ Which is the road from earth to heaven ? ’

Har laughed :

‘ Have you never been told how the Gods made a bridge from earth to heaven, called Bifrost ? You have seen it, if you did not know what it was. Perhaps you call it the rainbow. It is a most mighty bridge, and yet if—and yet when the sons of Muspellheim ride over it they will break it down.’

‘ The Gods cannot have made such a bridge in earnest. They might have made one that could not be broken down.’

‘ You are but a man. The Gods are not to blame. Bifrost is a good bridge. It is the best of all possible bridges ; it cannot resist the sons of Muspellheim, nor can anything else. Why, then, should the Gods have tried to make a better bridge, when they had made one which would keep out any one and anything save the sons of Muspellheim ? It keeps out the Giants.’

It would have been easy to annoy Har still more, but Gangler asked him :

‘ What did the All-Father make after Asgard ? ’

‘ He formed a council to govern Asgard and Midgard. They built themselves a temple of gold for the high seat of the All-Father and the twelve seats of the other

Gods. It is the best and the biggest house on earth, and its name is Gladsheim. They built another beautiful palace, called Wingolf, for the Goddesses. They built also a smithy, and there they worked at the forges with hammer and tongs. They made things of metal and gems and wood, but above all they made things of gold. Everything in their houses was of gold, and this was called the age of gold. It was destroyed by the coming of women from Giantland.

‘While they sat on their thrones the Gods remembered the maggots in the dead body of Ymir, and they gave them the shape and the understanding of men, and homes in the earth and in the rocks. These were the Dwarfs, and though small they had often much wit.

‘At one time it happened that a Dwarf, named All-wise, took the shape and size of a God, and by a trick persuaded the Gods to promise him Freya for his wife. After giving orders to the servants to deck his cavern and make ready a feast for the bride, he hurried off merrily to fetch her home. He had now returned to his true shape, and outside Valhalla he was met by Odin, who said to him, seeing his wedding attire :

“Who are you? why are you pale about the nose? You look a sorry sort of bridegroom.”

“My name is All-wise,” answered the Dwarf. “My home is in a cave under the earth. I have only come here to fetch my bride, and I hope you are not thinking to break your promise.”

“But I am,” said Odin, “I am the bride’s guardian, and she can do nothing without my consent. I was not at home when she was betrothed.”

“Who are you, then, to be guardian to the lovely maid?” asked the Dwarf, contemptuously.

“I am the Wayfarer, Longbeard’s son. Nevertheless,

the maid cannot make a match unless I consent," said Odin.

"If that is so, I would rather have your permission, though you are a wayfaring man. I will not lose the snow-white maid by any scruples."

"She shall be yours, All-wise, if you can answer all my questions. Tell me first, you who probably know everything, what other names has the Earth?"

"The Gods call it the 'Field'; Giants call it the 'Ever-green'; Elves the 'Growing'."

"What are the names for Heaven?"

"Gods call it 'Warmer'; Giants 'High-home'; Elves 'Fair-roof'; Dwarfs 'Drip-hall'."

"What are the names for the Moon?"

"It is the 'Whirling-wheel' in Hell; the 'Hastener' among Giants; 'Sheen' among Dwarfs; 'Year-teller' the Elves call it."

"And the Sun?"

"It is 'Dwales-doll' among Dwarfs; 'Ever-glow' among Giants; 'Fair-wheel' among Elves."

"What is the Wind?"

"It is the 'Waverer' of the Gods; the 'Whooper' of the Giants; the 'Soft-gale' of the Elves; in Hell they call it 'Whistle-gust'."

"What is the Sea?"

"The Gods call it 'Level'; the Elves 'Sea-blink'; the Dwarfs 'Deep'."

"And Fire?"

"It is called 'Greedy' by Giants; 'Furnace fire' by Dwarfs; in Hell it is the 'Destroyer'."

"What is Night?"

"It is called 'Unlight' by Giants; 'Sleep-joy' by Elves; 'Dream-fairy' by Dwarfs."

"What is Ale?"

‘ “ ‘ Beer ’ among Gods ; ‘ Clear-beer ’ among Giants ; ‘ Mead ’ in Hell ; ‘ Good cheer ’ among Dwarfs. ”

‘ And thus by many questions, which could only be answered after much thinking, Odin wasted the Dwarf’s time.

‘ “ I never met one man, ” he said, “ who knew so many different names. But your wit has been too much for you. The Sun is now up, or, as Dwarfs call it, the ‘ Dwales-doll ’ ; and the Sun is too much for Dwarfs ; they cannot endure its light. ”

‘ The hall was full of sunshine, and All-wise was turned to stone ; and for a stone to marry a bride is impossible. ’

‘ Which, then, is the chief abode or most holy place of the Gods ? ’

‘ Under the ash-tree, Yggdrasil. There they hold their court every day, ’ answered Har. ‘ Yggdrasil is the greatest and best of trees. It stretches out over the world as a common ash-tree does over a cottage. The roots of it are in Heaven, in Giantland, and in Niflheim. A dragon is always gnawing at the root which is in Niflheim. Many other serpents also gnaw at the roots ; four harts nibble the buds ; and the bark is rotting. An eagle who knows many things has its perch among the branches of Yggdrasil, and a squirrel named Rata-tusk runs up and down, telling the eagle’s words to the dragon and trying to make strife between them. Under the root in Giantland is Mimir’s brook, whose water gives wisdom and understanding. The All-Father himself once went to the brook for a draught, but Mimir would not give it unless he left an eye for a pledge. Under the third root is Weirds’ brook, and beside it the Gods sit in judgment. Every day they ride up over Bifrost bridge to Weirds’ brook. These are the names of their

horses : Gleed and Gylli, Gler and Skidbrim, Silvertop and Sini, Hostage and Fallow-hoof, Goldcrest and Lightfoot. Only one of the Gods may not ride over Bifrost, and that is Thor. If he were to ride over it in his thunder-chariot he would set it on fire. So he must walk, wading through the deep waters of Kormth and Wormth and the two Charlocks every day.

‘Many fair palaces have been built in Heaven. One standing close to the Weirds’ brook is the home of three maidens, Weird, Verdandi, and Skuld. These are the Norns; they water Yggdrasil with the water of Weirds’ brook, and they make men’s fates. They dwell alone except for two swans in the brook. There are many other Norns. One or another of them comes to every child that is born, and decides what is to be its fate. Such Norns are of the race of Gods. Some Norns belong to the race of Dwarfs, others are Elves. Of Elves there are two kinds. The Elves of Light, dwelling in Elflheim which is in Heaven, are as bright as if sunlight flowed in their veins for blood; but the Dark Elves who live down in the earth are blacker than pitch.’

Gangler hardly listened to this about the two sorts of elves. ‘If these Norns,’ he said to Har, ‘give men their fates, good or bad, their gifts are very different. They are not like a good farmer who gives equally to his cattle that all may thrive, but like a bad mother who gives good things to one child and bad or nothing at all to another. Some men are fortunate and rich, others poor and in every way unfortunate; some live to be old, others are cut off in childhood or in their prime.’

‘Good Norns,’ said Har, ‘make good fates for men, but evil Norns make bad ones, and they alone should be blamed for them.’

Gangler was silent and not glad. He could see these

Norns too plainly to speak. They were three black-haired sisters living alone in a large dark house beside the brook. They never spoke to one another, but seemed to understand without speaking as they went to and fro in the long rooms, weaving. They wove just as if they were working at clothes for some one else. They had no joy in it, but went on and on. They did not care what they had made, when once it was done. They were like slaves who have too much work to do for a master whom they never see. One was as pale as any living thing can be, and sighed continually as she went from one web to another: she was too tired to leave off her toil. One of her sisters seemed to have more spirit, for now and then she clutched at the web and tore it in anger; but she was angry with herself, not with what she had made, and so she began another immediately, and the only effect of her anger was that her hand trembled and her lips were touched with foam. The other was neither sad nor glad. She never smiled or sighed, but worked as if she were asleep. It was so easy to her that she closed her eyes. Yet, like her two sisters, she laid down her work at the very moment when her day was over, and never began before it was time. And as Gangler watched them he said to himself: 'If these three women make men's fates, somebody has made theirs for them long ago. If they were to die it would not be easy to find three other such sisters among the slave women who are no longer young.' But he was still silent.

Therefore Har continued:

'Many other fair mansions stand in heaven. There is Breidablik, and Glitnir, and three most beautiful of all, brighter than the sun, which will stand when heaven and earth pass away, and there in the glittering

ale-hall under the golden roof built upon the hills of the moon just men shall dwell for ever. Some say that this is now the palace of the Elves of Light, but we do not know. We have only heard tell of it.'

Gangler was tired, and would have fallen asleep but for those three kings. To his half-dreaming eyes they seemed to be Gods. He was afraid that they would disappear if he slept, and that they might send him away if he asked no more questions. He asked, therefore, why it was that Summer was hot and Winter cold.

'A wise man,' said Har, 'would never ask that, and any foolish one can answer it. The reason is that the father of Summer was of a sweet and kindly nature, and Summer took after him; while the father of Winter was grim and chill, and his son likewise.'

In spite of his fear and his good intentions, Gangler fell fast asleep while Har was speaking.

III

ODIN AND VALHALLA

As those three kings were still sitting on their thrones when he awoke, Gangler refreshed himself with food and drink before asking them further questions. First he asked :

‘ Who are the Gods that men must believe in ? ’

‘ There are twelve,’ answered Har.

‘ There are also the Goddesses,’ said Jafnhar, ‘ no less divine and mighty.’

‘ The greatest of the Gods is Odin. He is the God of men and of all other Gods, and the others obey him as children do their father. Frigga is his wife, a Goddess who sees all that is to happen in the future but never reveals it. Odin has many other names. He is called . . . ’

Har rumbled out a long roll of half a hundred names for Odin. When he had come to an end, Gangler said :

‘ Odin has many names. Only a wise man can remember them all and know why each was given to the God.’

‘ Yes,’ said Har, ‘ a man must have a good memory to remember these names. There is a good reason for them all. Each one was given because of some power which he possesses or some deed which he performed. There is nothing which he cannot do, and he does it better than it could be done by any other. He knows everything, and sees everything with the help of his two ravens, Hugin and Munin. They sit upon his shoulders and tell him all they have seen and heard in flying about the world. One of Odin’s names is Friend of the Ravens.’

‘Then he does not know and see everything by himself?’ said Gangler.

‘His task is not easy,’ said Har. ‘Much of his wisdom came from the precious mead which belonged to Baletflorn’s son. He learnt nine sage songs from this giant, but before he could do so he had to hang nine days and nights on the gallows without bread or wine, and wounded with a spear. It was not by lying at ease in Lidskialf that he became famous and earned the name of Dain among Elves, Dwale among Dwarfs, All-wise among Giants. He learnt songs such as no king’s daughter or any son of man knows. They will cure all sorrow and all kinds of sickness. They will blunt an enemy’s sword and make his chains drop from the captive. They will stop the arrow before it has reached its mark: they will save a man from all dangers. If a hall is aflame when men are asleep, one of the songs will stay it, be the flame never so broad. They will make wars to cease. They will quiet the sea. They will defeat witches. They will put breath into the dead. They will gain the love of a maid. But what these songs are Odin has kept secret save from Frigga, his wife.’

‘How should I know him?’ asked Gangler. ‘What is he like?’

‘No man was ever in doubt about Odin unless he disguised himself. He is tall and old, like an old king; but he will never be older, nor can he be wiser. He has but one eye, for the other he left with Mimir after drinking the wise water of Mimir’s brook.’

But in spite of these words of Har, Gangler pictured Odin not as an old king, perhaps because he was an old king himself, but as an old wayfaring man whom he had once met in winter. He was half sitting, half standing against a bank, and appeared to be looking

earnestly up the road. The king thought he had never seen a man look so wise and noble, and yet he could not see his face at all, but only the big white beard jutting out into the snow. His chin rested upon his two hands, which were clasped on the handle of his long walking-staff. He was grand enough to have been a king of men, and yet he was clothed in the manner of a poor wayfarer. His legs and head were bare. What was strangest of all was that a raven had alighted on the top of his head and stood there still. Evidently the man was from some far-off country, yet the way he must have come was over mountains impassable in that season even to the shepherds of the country. He must have been travelling for no common cause to have taken that short but perilous cut. Or was it hunger only? For fear of disturbing him, the king had stood still a few yards off. He now moved forward to speak. The raven flew in half a circle to the nearest tree. 'Where are you bound, old man?' asked the king. The man did not move or speak. The king now went close up to him, thinking he might be deaf. Then he saw that the old man was dead. It was this wayfarer that he now saw when Har spoke to him of Odin.

'One of the reasons why Odin has so many names,' said Har, 'is that he has travelled far and seen many peoples and had many adventures. Sometimes he took another name to conceal his own, as when he visited the Giant Wafthrudni.'

'What was that adventure?' asked Gangler.

'One day when Odin was with Frigga, his wife, in Valhalla, he told her that he was longing to visit Wafthrudni in Giantland, to see which could get the better of the other in a trial of wit. Frigga urged him not to go, because everybody said that the Giant was very wise.

Odin, however, had never seen him and was determined to go, now that his wife seemed to think the Giant might prove the wiser of the two. So he set out, and Frigga had nothing to do but wish him farewell and good fortune in Giantland.

'Odin greeted Wafthrudni, and said that he had come to see him and to learn if he were truly a wise and learned Giant. At this Wafthrudni was a little angry, and he said that the stranger should never leave the hall alive unless he showed himself the wiser of the two. He also asked Odin his name, and the God said that it was Ganger. He asked Ganger to come up and sit beside him, but he would not. Then Wafthrudni asked him many questions about things on earth and in heaven, and Odin answered them every one rightly. The Giant was astonished above all when the stranger was able to tell him the name of the plain where Surtur and the Gods are to meet for battle.

"Thou art wise indeed, O Ganger," said the Giant. "Come now up to my bench and let us sit and talk together." He was glad to have so wise a guest, who answered swiftly and clearly.

'But now when Odin had sat down it was his turn to question. He asked about the beginnings of the world, the making of the earth and the Frost Giants, and who was the father of Winter and of Summer; and where the wind came from. Wafthrudni knew it all, yet he answered slowly, as if it had been long since he had had to show his knowledge and he hardly knew where to find it. At length Odin began to ask him about things that were to happen in the future. He asked where the new sun would come from after the wolf had swallowed this one up, and the Giant knew. He asked what kind of death Odin would have to die when the

end came, and the Giant told him that the wolf would swallow up the All-Father also. Then Odin asked him, "What did Odin whisper in his son Balder's ear when Balder lay dead?" Wafthrudni laughed and looked craftily at Odin, saying, "What you whispered in your son's ear long ago no one knows. Odin, it is vain for me to strive with you in wit, wisest of all as you are and ever shall be." Whether Odin did not altogether like the words "ever shall be", who shall say? But he and the Giant remained silent in the hall that evening, nor could Frigga persuade her husband to tell her about the contest on his return.

'Once Odin went as a blind wayfarer to the hall of King Heidrek, who was a famous man for asking and answering riddles. He thought little of the blind man, and said that he would guess all his riddles or else forfeit his life. Odin began asking riddles.

"I wish," he said, "I had what I had yesterday. Guess what it was: it harms men, hinders words, and yet also rouses words?"

"Ale," said the king.

"What is that one with a high voice, who walks on hard places over and over again; he kisses very fast, has two mouths, and walks on nothing but gold?"

"A goldsmith's hammer," said the king.

"What was that I saw outside the hall turning its head down towards Hell and its feet up to the sun?"

"A leek," said the king.

"What is it that has ten tongues, twenty eyes, and forty feet, and moves along?"

"A sow with a litter of nine pigs," said the king.

"Who are the two that have ten feet, three eyes, and one tail?"

“The One-eyed Odin riding Sleipnir, his eight-legged horse.”

“What did Odin whisper in Balder’s ear before he was laid on the funeral pile?”

“That is what only I know besides Odin,” said the king, but as he would not answer he was beaten and ought to have forfeited his life. Instead of giving in he drew his magic sword and struck at Odin, who escaped by flying away in the shape of a hawk. Heidrek did not live long afterwards, but died by that very sword in the hand of one of his slaves.

‘At another time Odin went disguised to the hall of King Geirrod, a wise and cruel king, but not wise enough to see that the stranger was no common traveller. He seized Odin, who made no resistance, and bound him down on the hearth so that the fire scorched him. For three days Geirrod left him there, refusing him food and drink. At the end of the third day Agnar, the king’s son, took pity on him and gave him a horn full of wine to drink, and as he lay there Odin burst out into a song. First he hailed the good Agnar, saying, “The God of men hails thee. Thou never gavest or shall give a more lucky drink.” Lying there on the hearth, he saw in vision the Gods and the halls of Asgard, all bright and blessed in their beauty like the white clouds shining high in the air when the lower clouds are still ragged and dark after a tempest. He sang of Valhalla and its five hundred and forty doors, where every day came the men who died in battle, made whole again and rejoicing in the wine of Odin served by the Valkyries; of Breidablik, Balder’s palace, the most blessed of palaces; of the other beauteous abodes; of the tree Yggdrasil; of the sun rejoicing in the heavens, and of the wolf that follows it. As sometimes a chump of old wood sings a bird-like

song before it catches fire on the hearth, and all men become silent to listen to it, because it is winter and all birds are songless; thus Odin sang on the hearth, but far more sweetly and more mightily. Then even as the chump of wood suddenly ends its song and bursts into flames, so the God ceased and rose up, revealing himself as the God above all other Gods. Geirrod tried to rise up, but could not. Odin turned to him and spoke in anger: "Geirrod, thou art drunk, thou hast drunken too deep. Never shalt thou join the company of the blessed ones who drink with Odin at Valhalla. Thou shalt be a corpse, and no more. For I am Odin." Once more Geirrod tried to rise up; he stumbled over his sword, and it pierced him through the body so that he fell dead; and the good Agnar became king and reigned in his father's place.'

'Why are there five hundred and forty doors to Valhalla?' asked Gangler.

'Because the host within could not break forth when the day comes if there were fewer. In Valhalla Odin gathers all the warriors who die in battle. In the end they will go forth with Odin to fight at the day of Ragnarok-Ragnarok. But until then they fight and eat and drink and welcome the new-comers. By night the shining of their swords lights up their feasts, and they sleep like logs until the cock crows and it is time to begin fighting again. No wounds can outlast that sleep. However much they gash and pierce one another they are healed again as easily as linen is washed, and beautiful Valkyries, who are Odin's cup-bearers, serve these chosen ones also with drink. There is no end to the drink of Odin. You could as soon use up all the light of the sun as all his ale. For in the midst of the hall rises a great ash, and there is a goat called Alidrun always nibbling

at the roots of the tree. Instead of milk, ale runs out of the udders of this goat all day into a jar that can never be emptied. Into this jar the Valkyries dip the horns and the goblets, and hand them to the warriors. For much fighting makes them thirsty, and much drinking makes them thirstier still. Nor does this spoil their appetites. Every day a boar of suitable size is boiled for them by Odin's cook. But just as the warriors grow no larger for all their enormous feasts, so the boar is no smaller by the end of the day. The boar will last as long as Valhalla.'

'Do they never grow weary?' asked Gangler.

'They do not,' said Har, 'or what good would it do them to go to Valhalla? It would be better for them to be as dead as Geirrod. No. They are never weary. But of course they grow tired at times, and very glad they are, because if they did not they would never have the pleasure of resting. They have no enemies in Valhalla. When the young King Helgi died, that was like a noble ash among thorn-bushes, he entered Valhalla; and the first man he saw was his old enemy, King Hunding; and he said, "Hunding, pray get ready a bath and light a fire and tie up the hounds and bait the horses, and give the hogs their swill before thou goest to sleep!" Helgi did not know yet that he was in Valhalla. Then Hunding rose up and greeted him, and they sat down together. In Valhalla men never think of yesterday or to-morrow. They do not begin a fight with thinking of the end of it. They do not spoil one mouthful of the boar by considering the next or the last. They eat because Odin has given them teeth, stomachs, appetites, and a huge wild boar. They drink for an equally good reason. No man could refuse drink offered to him by one of the Valkyries.'

'The Valkyries are sisters of the Norns. Some of them have been Norns, and some of them may be Norns again. But in Valhalla these maids of Odin are not sad; nor do they think about men's fates. They are beautiful, and they serve Gods and men. They are almost as tall as a warrior, so that the eye of a warrior standing up is on a level with the tops of their heads; sitting down, his eye is level with their girdles. As they go to and fro their long yellow hair streams behind them; for their steps are swift, and the wind blows without ceasing through the five hundred and forty doors. They stop often to talk to the warriors. Their voices are very sweet, and they are wise with such wisdom as is necessary in Valhalla. Sometimes Odin sends one of them down to the battle-field to summon a dying warrior to the banquet: after some battles more than one of the Valkyries have been seen, sitting on horseback like warriors, with helms and shields. Dying men have heard them speak to one another about the dead who have gone to increase Odin's host in Valhalla. King Hakon talked to one of them as he lay dying on the deserted battle-field; but very soon she had to leave him, saying: "But now we must ride to the great city of the Gods, to tell Odin that a mighty king is coming to see him." Some newly dead warriors will hardly believe that they are in Valhalla until they see the Valkyries. When King Hakon arrived, Odin sent two of the Gods out to lead him into the hall. Hakon was dripping with blood; he was angry, and would not notice the kind words of the messengers, though they bade him take ale with the Gods and join his eight brothers who were already there. He would not take off his armour, but said to himself: "One should take good care of one's helm and mail-coat. 'Tis good to have

things ready at hand." But as he said this he went in at one of the doors. As he saw the Valkyries serving the warriors, he thought no more about the old hacked mail-coat and the broken helmet. Their beauty made him glad.

'Yet some tell that they have seen Valkyries on the battle-field, weaving a red web of fate as they rode in and out among the hosts. They were singing a wild song about this web. They were weaving it, they said, as friends of Odin. They could order the battle; they could choose the victors; they sang as the battle drew to an end; their web covered both sky and earth blood-red. They had destroyed their enemies and saved their friends, and they rode away fast on their bare-backed steeds, with their drawn swords in their hands.'

IV

BALDER AND LOKI

GANGLER was now anxious to hear more about Balder, so he said to Har :

‘ Why should Odin whisper in his son’s ear when he was dead ? ’

‘ No God was so much loved either by Gods or by men as Balder. He was also the most beautiful ; his nature was happy and strong, and his beauty shone out like the sun. Some said that he looked too like a woman, and they laughed at him for it unless they happened to know the weight of his fist. Yet he was both mild and wise. Nothing dark or evil could exist near him or in his radiant palace, Breidablik. Only in his sleep could evil come to Balder, and at length it came. He dreamed evil dreams, so that when he awoke he was sad, though he could not remember them. The Gods were sad at the sight of Balder haunted by dreams, and they took counsel in order to find out, if possible, why the dreams came. But Odin himself went alone down to Niflheim to see a prophetess and ask her about Balder. The ancient sire of the Gods laid the saddle on his horse Sleipnir, and rode down until he came to the lofty hall of Hell. At the gate stood a huge burial-mound which had been raised over the body of the prophetess. There he stopped, and began chanting spells to raise her from her grave. Suddenly, where there had been nothing a moment before, there was the prophetess, asking :

“ Who is this stranger that has made me take this

weary journey up from the dead? I have been snowed on with snow; I have been beaten with much rain; I have been drenched with dew; long have I been dead."

' Then Odin said :

" My name is Vegtam the Traveller. Tell me news of Hell, and I will tell thee news of Earth. Is there any one for whom they are getting ready the benches for a banquet in Hell ? "

" Yes," answered the prophetess, " they are getting ready for Balder in Hell, though in their palace the Gods are merry and not thinking of such things. But I have already said more than I meant."

" Oh! speak on, wise one, I pray thee; I must know everything now. Who will be the death of him? Who will slay Odin's son, Balder ? "

" It will be Hod. He shall slay his brother. I will speak no more."

" But thou must, O prophetess. Tell me at least who are these wailing maidens that I see, three of them casting up their arms in sorrow ? "

' Then she laughed the laugh of the dead, for she knew that Odin alone could see these things. She bade him ride home, and said that no one should see her again until the Destroyers came at the end.

' But while Odin was away Frigga had been thinking how to save Balder, if it was death that was haunting his dreams. She made everything in earth and air and water, and fire itself, take an oath not to harm Balder. This they all gladly did. There was now great rejoicing among the Gods, first, because Balder was safe; and second, because they had invented a new game. The game was to throw all kinds of weapons at Balder, to show that metal, wood, or stone would do him no harm. Balder stood up without flinching while they

threw javelins and stones, cut with swords and axes, thrust with lances, battered with clubs. Balder was unhurt, and all were laughing with gladness and amusement. It was thought a great honour to Balder to show him thus how nothing would consent to hurt him, not even the sharp edges and points that were made to do harm. Only one God, Loki, was sorry that the sword would not cut Balder, nor the javelin pierce him, nor the stones bruise his flesh.'

'Why was that?' asked Gangler. 'Was there a quarrel between Balder and Loki?'

'No.'

'Then why was Loki sorry that he could not be hurt?'

'Because it was his nature.'

'I see,' said Gangler. For he really did see, as soon as Har spoke, a crooked-bodied and crooked-minded God, in his mind's eye. This was Loki. Except that he was mightier than any man, he was made exactly in the image of a man whom Gangler had known long before. He was the fool at a king's court. His face had made every one laugh since he was a little boy, and so the king took him for his fool. Every one continued to laugh at whatever he said because he had a ridiculous face. Often he said very wise things, and often very cruel and strange things, but they laughed all the same. The fact is that he made them all into such fools with laughter that they could not judge between wisdom and folly. He himself never laughed, because he knew that if ever he did they would look very grim and think that he was laughing at them. But his mouth curled and twitched, and they laughed all the more. Loki's mouth was curling and twitching when Gangler saw him, and all the Gods roared with laughter at him, save Balder, who kept his eyes as much as

possible away from the crooked, ugly, mighty, unlaughing God. Loki was very nearly smiling. . . .

'Loki,' said Har, 'turned away from this game.'

'When his back was turned,' said Gangler, 'he smiled, I am sure, as Erne the fool did once when I was a boy; and that night the old king had a dream and awoke mad, and never said any wise thing again except that Erne ought to be king.'

'I was saying,' said Har, 'that Loki turned away from this game. He went away to change himself into the likeness of a woman. When he had done so he came to Frigga's mansion and said to her: "They are all hewing and hurling at Balder." She laughed and said:

"Yes, I know. No weapon can hurt Balder. All things of wood and metal have sworn it."

"Has every single thing made this promise?" asked the pretended woman.

"Yes, everything."

"You were wise."

"He is my dearest child. I could not rest until all had sworn"—then she laughed—"all except that little bush of mistletoe growing in the poplar-tree on the east side of Valhalla."

'Loki also laughed. Then he went quickly away and changed into his own shape. He trimmed a piece of the mistletoe into a dart, and went with it to the place where the Gods were again at the same sport with Balder. Only one was not playing, and that was Hod the Blind.

"Why are you not playing, Hod?" asked Loki.

"Because I am blind, and I have nothing to throw."

"They are all too busy to look after you," said Loki, handing him the mistletoe. "Take this dart, then, and pay honour to Balder."

' Hod took the dart and turned as Loki directed him, until he was facing Balder ; then he threw.

' A laugh went up at the sight of the blind God throwing his little dart. Some of them continued to laugh even when the dart entered Balder's eye. Then the beautiful God fell to the ground. At first all were silent in astonishment, because he lay still : only Hod was laughing. It was now that Odin came up. He looked at Balder and at Hod, and he knew well what had happened. Balder was dead. All burst into loud lamentations, except Odin, who stood silent over the body, and Loki, who crept away.

' At length Odin spoke :

' " Weep no more, Gods and companions. Balder was doomed, and he is dead. We also are doomed, and we are yet alive : nothing remains for us but to bury him like a God, and to live on the life of Gods until we must die. Eat and drink to-night, and to-morrow build the funeral pile on Balder's ship, and send it out with fire into the sea." Then Odin left them, and they sat down in silence and took their cups from the hands of the Valkyries. Hod alone would not join the feast. He made his way sadly to Frigga's palace, Fensaler, and told his story. She, who knew everything, knew what had happened. She did not blame the blind thrower, but she said something might yet be done. If one would take Sleipnir, Odin's horse, and ride to Hell, he might persuade its queen to let Balder return. Hod was willing to go, and yet he was helpless, as Frigga knew. She bade him return to Asgard and reveal the plan to the first one whom he should meet. When he returned the feast had broken up, and the Gods had carried Balder to his own palace of Breidablik. But Hod met one of them, the swiftest of all the Gods, named Hermod.

He told Hermod what Frigga had said, and bade him saddle Sleipnir. He himself went home, fixed his sword upright in the floor, and fell on it and died.

'Early in the morning the Gods, led by Frey on his boar with the golden tusks, carried Balder's body down to his ship, which stood dry upon the shore. But they could not launch the ship. So they sent to Giantland for the Giantess Hyrrokin to help them. She came swiftly riding on her wolf, which she guided with a bridle of twisted snakes. When she had alighted, the warriors who took charge of her steed had to throw it to the ground before he would stay still. With one touch Hyrrokin sent the ship sliding over the shingle into the sea, but so rapidly that the keel caught fire. This infuriated Thor; he seized his hammer, and could hardly be prevented from breaking the skull of the Giantess. The Gods carried down pine-trees and made a pile in the middle of the ship, and on it they laid the body. This sight broke the heart of Nanna, Balder's wife, and her body was laid beside his. All the Gods were on the shore, standing gloomy and tall like a long grove of trees. The ravens were perched on Odin's shoulder. The Giants stood a little apart. The Dwarfs were gathered in a multitude among the rocks at the foot of the sea-cliffs, but a few of them went in and out among the Gods like starlings among sheep. All mourned for Balder in silence, until the flames began to flap higher and wider than the sails had ever been; and as if driven along by the flames instead of sails, the ship rolled out into the sea. The wind was blowing strong from the land, but had there been no wind the breath of all that assembly mourning for Balder and crying farewell to him would have been strong enough to waft the ship. Their cries frightened all the sea-birds from their nests in the

cliffs. The birds seemed to be silent, so loud was the lamentation, until the moment when the flames far away sank down into the sea like a bird settling in its nest. Not a sound was heard after that except the seagulls. The Dwarfs retired into the rocks. The Giants trooped up over the cliff. The Gods in twos and threes, and some solitary, turned away last.

'At Asgard, many days afterwards, Hermod appeared. For nine days and nights he had been journeying in dark glens, where, he said, the blind Hod could have found a way as well as he. He was long among those mountains which Niord, the father of Freya, loathed, though he was there only nine nights. "The howl of the wolves," he said, "seemed evil to me after the song of the swans." At last Hermod came to the river Gioll, on this side of Hell. A bridge of gold spanned the river, but at the other side the maiden Modgunn asked him his name and race. She said that five companies of dead men had ridden over the bridge on the day before, and had not shaken it so much as he. He was no dead man. What right had he to cross into Hell? He told her that he was seeking Balder in Hell, and asked had she seen him pass. She said that Balder had crossed, and that Hermod must go north to reach Hell. He went on with his journey until he halted before the gates. There he alighted, tightened his saddle-girths, mounted, and struck both spurs into Sleipnir and leaped over. Balder was sitting on a throne in Hell, and Hermod sat talking with him all night. In the morning he begged the queen to let Balder come back with him. He told her that all Gods and men and all created things were sorrowing for Balder. She answered that if all of them desired Balder's return he should go, but if any one spoke against him, or refused to mourn,

he must stay. Hermod rose to take back the message, bringing with him a ring for Odin from Balder, and a linen mantle for Frigga from Nanna. These presents he now gave to Odin and Frigga.

'The Gods sent messengers all over the world, bidding all things to weep, in order that Balder might be rescued from Hell. Even to the stones and grasses, all things obeyed, as they would have obeyed the command of Spring or Winter. The messengers came back rejoicing in spite of their tears. But as they were nearing Asgard they met an old hag at the opening of a cave. They begged her also to weep. She answered that she had done with weeping. Who was Balder, that she should weep for him, alive or dead? She had no tears left. "Let the Queen of Hell keep what she has : it is better so." Some thought that this hag was Loki, but nevertheless Balder remained in Hell.'

After hearing the story of Balder, Gangler exclaimed :

'How can the Gods allow such an evil one as Loki to live? Did they not punish him for these crimes? What was Thor's hammer doing? Why did they not put Loki on the funeral pile?'

'Softly, softly,' said Thridi; 'in the end Loki was paid his wages. You do not understand that he was just as much a God as any of the others. He could not be wiped out by a stroke of the sword, although he did nothing but what was painful or hateful to men as well as Gods. He was the son of a Giant.'

'Being only the son of a Giant,' said Gangler, 'why did they let him continue his life of crime and mischief?'

'Well, there it is. He did continue,' answered Har. 'He has not his equal for cunning and treachery, and in his way he is very mighty. He has led the Gods into danger, and has led them out again. His children

are mighty, especially those whose mother was the Giantess Angurbodi. The wolf Fenrir, the serpent Jormungand, and Hela the Queen of Hell, are his children by this wife. When the Gods heard of this family growing up in Giantland they were alarmed; they inquired into the future, and learnt that these children were to be an evil and busy race. Odin thought it best to send one of the Gods to fetch the children. They came. Odin looked at them and they at him, but they paid one another no compliments, nor indeed spoke words of any kind. Odin threw the serpent into the ocean which surrounds Midgard like a ring; but it did not die though it stayed in the water; its tail grew in one direction, its head in another, so that now it has completely encircled Midgard and holds its tail in its mouth.

Hela was cast into Niflheim. There she became Queen of Hell, and every one, man or God, who dies in any way except in battle, goes to Niflheim and becomes her subject. Her palace is very high, and the gates of it very strong. Her hall is called Misery. Her table is Hunger; her knife, Starvation; her man, Delay; her maid, Sloth; her threshold, Ruin; her bed, Care; and the curtains and tapestry of her room are Burning Anguish. She cannot disguise herself. Though she does not speak, men know what is in her mind. She has a mirk face, grim and unchanging.

Hela's brother, Fenrir the wolf, remained with the Gods. From the first he snapped at the hand that fed him. Only Tyr at last would go near him. He thrived upon his food, whatever it was, and he grew to an enormous size and did not stop growing. The Gods were warned that Fenrir would one day be the death of them. They therefore made up their minds to

appear to be his masters until the day appointed. They had an iron fetter forged for him, and as they asked him to show how strong he was he allowed himself to be bound with the fetter. He burst the fetter with ease, and they tried to pretend not to be surprised. They made another fetter that was far stronger, and persuaded him to put it on by saying that there would be no doubt about his strength if he could break this; as to the other one, it was a jest, and they were sorry for making a fool of him. As the wolf could not speak, he said nothing, but allowed himself to be fettered. When he was bound he shook himself, took a deep breath, and threw himself on the ground, rolling over and over. Thus he broke the second fetter.

'The Gods could not conceal their despair. But Odin sent a messenger into the country of the Dark Elves, asking the Dwarfs to make a fetter to bind Fenrir. The Dwarfs made it smooth and soft as silk. For in making it they used the beards of women, the roots of stones, the breath of fish, and the sound of a cat's foot. The Gods were pleased with it, not so much because of its strength, which they had not tested, but because it was the work of the Dwarfs. They showed Fenrir this cord and begged him to try his strength on it, and to prove that it was stronger than it seemed they each took it in turn and failed to break it. "No one can do it except Fenrir," they said. Fenrir appeared to be unwilling. He looked scornfully at the cord, as much as to say that he would get no glory by breaking such a slender bond. On the other hand, if its thickness gave no idea of its strength it would be wise to keep out of it. The Gods began to be puffed up with pride at the respect which Fenrir showed for the Dwarfs' cord. They said to one another, "Evidently he is afraid of it, and if he is too weak to

break it we need not be afraid of him, but can safely set him free at once." Fenrir could not refuse; but neither could they force him to accept. He made one condition, that he should hold the hand of one of the Gods in his mouth as a pledge. Tyr was the only one who offered his hand. He put it instantly between Fenrir's jaws. Then the Gods fastened the cord. Fenrir stretched and strained and rolled, but without loosening or breaking the cord. The Gods roared with laughter, all except Tyr, whose hand was bitten off. They made haste now to fasten the wolf to a rock that was sunk deep in the earth. He could not break loose, yet he did not cease trying to do so, and the sight of his mighty but helpless jaws opening and shutting frightened and at last irritated the Gods. So one of them thrust a sword into his mouth to make him shut it. The wolf now began to howl, and a river of foam ran out of his mouth. The river will run, and Fenrir will howl, until Ragnarok.'

'Oh, why did the Gods leave the wolf alive?' asked Gangler.

'Because,' said Har, 'there is a rule that the place where Fenrir is bound should not be stained with blood.'

'I see,' said Gangler.

V

LOKI; AND THE HORSE AND THE SHIP

GANGLER was wondering why Loki never drove any of the Gods mad, as Erne the Fool drove the king mad when he was a boy; and why they never thought of putting him up in the chief place among them instead of Odin.

'I wonder,' he said, 'that Loki is not the first of the Gods instead of Odin, since he is the father of Fenrir.'

'No,' said Har, 'that is not likely to happen yet, for Loki is now the least important of all the Gods.'

'One day the Gods and Goddesses, all except Thor and Loki, were feasting at the hall of Eager, the Sea God. It was the first time they had laughed as of old since Balder's death; Loki had not reappeared, and there was nothing to spoil the feast. That lying, deceitful God had been slinking about, not in shame but fear. Now, however, he was slinking back. He heard Odin's thundering laughter, and he said to himself: "They have forgotten Balder. They will forgive me as easily." But first he asked the cook what the Gods were talking about as they drank. "They are talking of their swords and spears, and the deeds they have done," said the cook, "but no one has a good word to say of you, Loki." At this he vowed that he would put poison into the Gods' drink, but he entered the hall smiling.'

Gangler muttered: 'I do not believe he was really smiling, any more than Erne when his lips curled and twitched.'

Har was not to be disturbed, and went on with his tale.

“ I am thirsty after a long journey,” said Loki, “ and I beg for one draught of your mead.”

‘ No one answered.

“ Why do ye sit silent and sulky ? Give me a seat or drive me away.”

‘ Bragi answered, saying :

“ The Gods will never give thee a seat at any joyous feast.”

‘ Loki turned to Odin :

“ Dost thou remember how we two long ago blended blood together ? We swore never to drink except together.”

‘ Odin knew the knavery of Loki, and did not smile ; neither was his heart moved ; yet he said :

“ Give him a place. That is better than hearing his nasty tongue.”

‘ Loki sat down and drank a health to Odin and the other Gods, all except Bragi. To quiet him, Bragi promised him a steed, a sword, and many rings, but in vain. Loki taunted him that he was a coward, and never had horse or arm-rings. Bragi grew angry and threatening : Loki kept on quietly taunting, and when Iduna, Bragi's wife, begged her husband to let him go on and not answer him, he insulted her also. Others now spoke, trying to heal the strife either by threats or by mild words ; but Loki had insults for all of them, and was so much quicker and quieter of speech, and kept in his seat so modestly, that they knew not what to do. Odin turned on him and said :

“ Loki, thou art drunk and foolish.”

But Loki had the last word. So he did with Frigga, when she begged Loki not to talk before the warriors about what Odin and the other Gods had done in their young days. Nor had Freya any more success. When-

ever any God or Goddess mentioned something shameful in Loki's history to try to silence him with shame, he invented something far worse about his accuser, who either could not or would not go on answering such a scullion. Heimdal said to him : " Thou art drunk, Loki, and out of thy wits. Too much drinking makes men babble without meaning." " Shut thy mouth, Heimdal. What dost thou know about anything, with thy dull life, always standing by the bridge with a wet back as the Gods' watchman ? " Big, simple old Heimdal gaped in astonishment. Thor's wife, Sif, then handed Loki a goblet to quiet him, saying :

" Now hail to thee, Loki, and take this foaming cup of old mead, and let at least one of the Gods go without an insult."

' But he drank the mead, and insulted her while his lips were wet with it. No answer came, and what with the mead and the fatigue of listening to such fools as the Gods, he was dozing off to sleep, still muttering vile insults half to himself, and laughing at them. As his eyes were half shut he did not see Thor enter, but he had no need of his quick ears to hear Thor speak.

" Be quiet, cur," said Thor, " or my hammer shall stop thy mouth and thy life at the same time."

' Loki started, but did not change his manner, except that he took up the empty goblet and looked into it, wishing he could drink. Then he said :

" Ha ! here is Thor, talking big as usual. Why talk so big ? Thou wilt not be so bold when it comes to fighting the wolf who is to swallow up Odin himself."

" Peace, Loki," said Thor, " or I will fling thee out, and then break every bone in thy body."

" I mean to have a long life," said Loki, " in spite of that hammer, which is more suitable for felling an ox,

or some one like Heimdal, or Odin, the father of us all, than for breaking my small bones."

"Oh, br-r-r," said Thor in fury, unable to find a word to stop his mouth with; and Loki, who knew perfectly well what he meant, got up and went away quietly, but nevertheless very swiftly. Once only he turned, to whisper to Eager, his host:

"This will be thy last banquet, Eager. The flame shall lick up everything here, and burn thy back also."

'He got off easily enough,' said Gangler, 'and every one else got off worse.'

'That was not the end,' said Jafnhar. 'When he was outside the hall he ran, and did not stop until he reached the mountains. There he made himself a house on a summit, with four doors, so that he could see on every side. For fear of the Gods, he never went out in his proper shape, but would spend his time at the foot of a waterfall in the likeness of a salmon, and in one shape or another he often heard the plans of the Gods for catching him. One day he was sitting alone with some flax and yarn, and he invented net-making such as fishermen afterwards used. But Odin, sitting high up, on Lidskialf, spied him out in his house, and the Gods set out against him. Loki was not to be surprised. He threw his net into the fire and ran to the waterfall, where he hid himself. The Gods found his dwelling empty, but one of them saw the burnt yet unbroken net lying like the ghost of a net in the ashes. They saw at once what it could be used for; they made another on this model, and with it went down to fish for the Loki salmon. Thor held one end of the net and the rest held the other, and so they dragged it from end to end of the pool under the waterfall. Loki, however, lay pressed down between two stones, and the net passed over him.'

They dragged the pool a second time, weighting the net so that it scraped up stones and all. But Loki leapt over the net and swam down the stream. The Gods followed after him, Thor alone running in mid-stream behind the net, in case he should turn back ; and so he did, with a great leap which ended in Thor's hand. Thor had him by the tail, and as salmon's tails were thicker then and less slippery than they are now, Loki did not escape. He now changed his form, but got no more pity as a God than as a salmon. The Gods dragged him to a cave, and placed in it three spiky rocks in a row, and bound Loki face upwards on their points. One of them hung up a serpent to the roof of the cave above him, so that its venom should drip on to his face. But Loki's wife would not allow him to suffer in this manner. She stood—and she still stands—beside him, catching the drops in a cup. When the cup is full she empties away the venom, and while she is doing so one drop always falls on Loki, which makes him howl and twist in spite of the pointed rocks. It is this twisting of Loki down in the cave that causes what men call earthquakes. There he will lie until Ragnarok, after which there will be no more earthquakes.'

'And, I hope, no more Loki,' said Gangler.

'Who shall say ?' said Har. 'All we know is that at present Odin is the greatest of Gods, as the ash Yggdrasil is the greatest of trees ; Skidbladnir the greatest of ships, Sleipnir of steeds, Bifrost of bridges, Bragi of bards, Habrok of hawks, and Garm of hounds.'

'Thou hast mentioned Sleipnir more than once,' said Gangler. 'What is there to say about him ?'

'Thou seemest to be entirely ignorant in this matter of Sleipnir, but thou wilt find it worth while to listen to what I shall say of it.'

‘ Once, when the Gods were building their homes here and there, a Giant workman came and offered himself for the work. He undertook to build a palace so strong that the Giants could not break into it, even if they should ever get over into Midgard. The price to be paid was the Goddess Freya, the sun, and the moon. The Gods thought it over and decided that they would pay the price, on these conditions: that he would finish the work without any one’s help, and all in one winter; if anything remained to be done on the first day of summer the workman would have to go without his price. He, on his part, was willing to accept these conditions: only, he asked to be allowed to make use of his horse, Svadilfari. This, on the advice of Loki, was granted.

‘ He was to begin his work on the first day of winter, and on the night before his horse was drawing stone for the building. When morning dawned the Gods came to look on, and they wondered very much at the size of the stones, for if hollowed out any one of them would have made a house for a man. They saw that the horse was doing the main part of the work. However, they had sworn oaths in the presence of witnesses undertaking to pay this man his price, and to let him have the help of a horse. He had insisted on such oaths as a Giant expects before trusting himself among the Gods.

‘ Some time before winter’s end the palace was almost ready. It was huge, and as firm as the earth itself. It was too high to be scaled by anything but birds or clouds. There were three days still to come before summer when only the gateway remained to be done. The Gods now began to think seriously about their bargain. When they made it they did not really think that the man could do the work, or that, if he did, they

would really have to give him Freya, the sun, and the moon. They now tried to recall who it was that first overcame their objection to this monstrous price, to send Freya away and to take down the sun and moon out of the sky. They agreed that it was Loki. He had done many evil and mischievous deeds; only he could have suggested this; and therefore he should be put to death, unless he could think of some way of getting out of this bargain. In fact they laid hands on him, and threatened him with a good will until he made a promise to outwit the workman.

‘That night, as the builder and his horse went out to fetch stone, a mare ran out from the forest which came on all sides to the edge of the quarry. She neighed and ran back again. Svadilfari also neighed. He forgot that he was going to haul stone, and started to run. When he came to a block, he leapt over it and left the wagon behind. Svadilfari ran after the mare, and the builder after Svadilfari. He ran all night, but lost his horse. His task was far beyond the strength of any man. But, it seems, he was not a man, but a Giant, and he now changed himself back into his true Giant shape and set to work. When the Gods saw that he was a Mountain Giant, they remembered their oaths only in order to break them. They called for Thor to pay the Giant his wages. This he did without waiting until the appointed day. He brought not Freya, not the sun, and not the moon, but only his own hammer. With this he struck the Giant a blow that broke his skull, so that he could not have taken away his wages even had they been offered to him as well as what he had already received.’

‘But what of Sleipnir?’

‘Sleipnir was born some time afterwards. He was the son of Svadilfari. He was a grey and had eight

legs, and he became the swiftest and strongest of all the horses that ever carried Gods or men. He is Odin's horse. As you know, he carried Odin to Giantland and Hermod to Hell.'

'Is there any story like this about Skidbladnir, the best of ships?' said Gangler. 'Is it the largest or is it the best?'

'It is the best. I did not say the largest,' said Har, 'Naglfar is a larger ship, the ship of Hell which will sail at the end, after Ragnarok. The Dwarfs built Skidbladnir as a present for Freya. They built her of the nails of dead men, and they repair her with the same material. She will hold all the Gods, with their weapons and stores of war. When her sails are hoisted, a breeze springs up and carries her swift and safe to whatever place the Gods choose. She is made of thousands of little pieces, fitted together with so much cleverness that when she is not wanted Freya can fold her up and keep her in her pocket.'

'I should like to have seen the Dwarfs building Skidbladnir. But are there any sea-dwarfs? I thought the Dwarfs belonged to the mountains and the bowels of the earth.'

'So they do.'

'Then what do they know about the sea?'

'Ask the Dwarfs. They know enough to have made the ship Skidbladnir, which is the best of all ships, and the best quality of it is that a God is as safe on it as on the land. For the Dwarfs were land-dwarfs. If it had been made by creatures of the sea, perhaps it would have been as dangerous as the sea.'

'Oh!' said Gangler.

VI

THOR

GANGLER was still thinking of Sleipnir and his eight legs. He could not imagine a horse with eight legs at first, until he remembered seeing one himself. It was galloping along the edge of a dense wood in the moonlight, and his shadow was clear beside him, so that there were eight legs galloping together.

'Did Sleipnir ever race to show that he was the best of horses?' he asked.

'Once Odin was riding Sleipnir towards Giantland, and the Giant Rungnir looked out of his door. . . .'

It was very odd, but those words, 'the Giant Rungnir looked out of his door,' painted a picture of house and Giant on Gangler's brain in less than a second. It was a house like the side of a woody hill, and the door was like a huge chalk-pit cut in the hill, and the Giant was stooping to look out, as if he were so tall that when he stood up his head reached to the inside of the hill-top or house. Rungnir was one of the red-haired Giants, and his beard glistened as if the inside of his house were damp with cookery.

'And as Rungnir looked out he said to himself, "Who can that be with the helmet of gold riding over sky and sea? He has a wonderful good horse." Odin heard him and said: "I would bet my head there is not a horse in Giantland equal to Sleipnir." "Tut!" said Rungnir, "it is a good enough horse, but my Goldmane is better."

‘Odin answered :

“Your Goldmane would go faster if Sleipnir were carrying him than if he ran with his own four feet.”

‘Rungnir was angry. He at once leapt up on Goldmane and galloped after Odin. But he could only just see Odin at last, disappearing through Asgard gates. There could be no doubt that Sleipnir was the better horse, and Odin said : “You should have let him carry Goldmane if you wanted to keep up with him.” Rungnir entered after him : in fact he rode right into the hall where the Gods were drinking, and called out for drink. They brought him mead in the bowl that Thor used to drink from, and he emptied it again and again. He lolled about in his seat, talking big and beastly. He said he could take up Valhalla and carry it to Giantland, and he could slay all the Gods except Freya and Sif, whom he would take away for wives. Freya was the only one who dared to carry drink to him now. He boasted that he would drink up all the Gods’ ale.

‘The Gods got tired of his boasting. Then Thor came in with his hammer, and asked :

“How comes it that dogs of Giants drink here? Why should Freya carry drink to the fellow?”

‘Rungnir said :

“Odin invited me.”

“Well,” said Thor, “you can stay, but you shall be sorry for it.”

“Much glory you may get, Thor!” said Rungnir, “from a foe without weapons. But if I had my shield and my hone I should like nothing better than a fight.”

“Get you gone, then, to Giantland,” said Thor, “and we will fight it out there.”

‘The Giants were proud of Rungnir for his journey to Asgard, but they were also anxious as to the battle.

Rungnir was the mightiest of the Giants, and if he should fall there was no knowing what Thor might do when swollen with pride of victory. They made a Giant out of clay, bigger even than Rungnir, to stand by his side and strike Thor with fear. This Giant of clay was called Muck-calf, and in spite of his size he was afraid of Thor. With Thor came his servant Thialfi, and Thialfi met Muck-calf, while Thor went up against Rungnir. The God began the battle by hurling his hammer, but the Giant cast his hone almost at the same time. The hone broke in two against the hammer, and one half crashed into Thor's head, so that he fell to the earth. The hammer found its way to Rungnir's head and broke into it. The Giant fell, but with one of his feet over the neck of the prostrate Thor: it stiffened with death, and Thialfi, who had easily upset the Muck-calf, could not move it; and there lay Thor helpless in the caress of that enormous foot. He was released at last by his own son, Magni, whose mother was a Giantess. Magni had the horse Goldmane as his reward from Thor, though Odin was angry that the son of a Giantess should have it. The half of the Giant's hone was still fast in Thor's head when he came home. A sibyl named Groa, the wife of Orion the Brave, tried to get it out by chanting spell songs. Thor believed that it was loosening, and he felt very grateful to Groa. So in his gratitude he told her a piece of news. He had been travelling over Sleet Bay from the North, and took Orion with him in his basket. But one of Orion's toes had been sticking out, and so got frozen. Thor had taken this useless frostbitten toe and cast it up into the heavens, and made the star with it which is called Orion's toe. Orion was limping slightly, but he would be home very soon, said Thor. Groa was excited by this news; she was sorry about the toe,

proud about the star, and glad about her husband's return; and off she went without finishing her spells. Therefore the hone is still in Thor's head.'

'Thor is in every story,' said Gangler. •

'He is the mightiest of the Gods,' said Har, and as he uttered the words his voice shook the roof of shields, and roused the other two kings to say also in voices like the sea: 'Thor is the mightiest of the Gods.' And Gangler muttered as if he were a child repeating a lesson: 'Thor is the mightiest of the Gods.' It seemed to him that Thor must be such a one as Jafnhar, the king who was now sitting before him in a throne of gold. He had been looking at Jafnhar and thinking of him not seated on a throne, but speaking and walking about. For without his throne Jafnhar was like a man whom Gangler remembered—a bearded red-faced captain coming home from war. Gangler had seen the man once only for a moment, with a newly emptied mead-horn in his hand, and his head thrown back, laughing among his companions by a roadside in the sun. He never heard the man speak or saw him do anything, yet he fancied that this man could have ruled the world. Still more did he think so now, seeing the image of this man seated on a throne before him, saying in his great voice: 'Thor is the mightiest of the Gods.' The man laughing in the sun had perhaps been Thor himself. But Har continued:

'Thor is perhaps what Odin was when he was young, and what he might still have been had he not become so wise and benevolent as he is. But Thor also is wise in his way. His palace is Bilstirnir, the largest of all houses. He rides in a chariot drawn by two goats. He has three famous possessions. First is his hammer, called Mjolnir. It is famous chiefly among the Frost Giants and Mountain Giants, because he has broken many of their

skulls with it—I mean the skulls of their friends and relations, for those whose skulls are broken make the hammer famous indeed, but are not alive to observe its fame.• Thor has also a belt that is above all others ; when he puts it on his strength is twice what it was before. The third possession is a pair of iron gauntlets ; these he has to wear when he is using his hammer, Miolnir.'

'Supposing,' said Gangler, 'supposing some one stole Miolnir and the gauntlets as well. Would they be of any use to any one but Thor?'

'It has never been tried,' answered Har, 'but once the hammer was stolen. Thor woke up, and saw instantly that the hammer had gone in the night. He shook his beard and tossed his locks in anger. The hammer was nowhere to be seen. "Loki," said Thor, "I have lost my hammer."

'They went together to Freya's bower, and Thor asked her to lend him her feather-dress to help him find his hammer. She gladly lent it. Loki put it on, and away he flew out of Asgard towards Giantland. Thrym, the lord of the Giants, was sitting on a mound plaiting golden leashes for his greyhounds, when he looked up and saw Loki.

"What news is there of the Gods?" he asked, "how are the Elves? Why hast thou come alone, Loki?"

"It goes ill with the Gods," he answered. "Is it thou, Thrym, that hast hidden the Thunderer's hammer?"

"It is, Loki. I have hidden Miolnir eight miles under ground. No man shall ever get it back unless he brings me Freya as a wife."

Loki made no answer, but flew off to Asgard. Thor

spied him while he was still high in air, and asked him to give his news immediately.

"I have good news," said Loki. "I know where the hammer is—with the Giant lord, Thrym. But it cannot be recovered unless Freya is given to him as wife."

'Thor went straight to Freya, and bade her make ready to go to Giantland. She refused, and snapped her necklace in her fury. She could not speak for some time, and when she did she only said: "I should be the man-maddest of women to drive with thee to Giantland." So the Gods took counsel together as to how to recover Mjolnir.

"I have a plan," said Heimdal. "Let us dress up Thor like Freya. Let him put on her bride's veil and her hood, put her necklace on his neck, let her keys hang down from his girdle rattling, and wear her brooches on his breast."

"I am not going to be dressed up like a woman," blurted Thor.

"If you don't," said Loki, "you will not get your hammer, and the Giants will take up their abode in Asgard."

'So Thor let them dress him up, and he was very glad to have the veil put on first to hide his shame. "I will be the bridesmaid," said Loki. The goats were fetched and harnessed to Thor's chariot. As they raged along the rocks were torn up and the earth blazed in flame.

'Thrym was glad at the sight. "Stand up," he said, "stand up, my Giants all, and make ready the benches. They are bringing me a wife from Asgard, Freya, the daughter of Niord. I had golden-horned cows and black unspotted oxen, I had treasures and jewels—I had these already. But now I have Freya."

'There was a great gathering of Giants feasting and

drinking ale in the evening at the bridal of Thrym. The false Freya ate a whole ox, eight salmon, and all the dainties that had been cooked for the ladies. She also drank three casks of mead.

'Said Thrym :

"Was ever a bride so ravenous before ? I have never seen one take such mouthfuls or drink such draughts."

'The bridesmaid Loki had an answer ready :

"Freya has not eaten for eight days, no ! not once during our journey, so eager was she to be in Giantland."

'Thrym grew vain as well as glad. He had been a little shy of his bride, but now he thought to give her a kiss. He bent down under the veil to do so ; then started back the whole length of the hall. "Why," he asked, "are Freya's eyes so terrible ? It is as if flames were darting from them."

"That is very natural," said Loki. "She has not slept for eight nights, so eager was she to be in Giantland."

'The Giant's aged mother came in to beg of Freya. "Give me the red-gold rings from thine arm," she said, "if thou wouldst win my love and my heart."

'The bride took no notice ; neither did the Giant, but called out for the hammer to be brought to make the bargain complete. "Lay Mjolnir in the maid's lap," he shouted.

'Thor was as glad as any bride when the hammer was laid in his lap. His heart laughed in his breast, and his eyes and teeth flashed through the veil, as he grasped the hammer. "Now thou shalt have the hammer back again, my love," said Thor, and it sank deep into the Giant's skull. His blows were all the heavier because the veil made him angry with shame. He smote the whole company of Giants before he took off his veil and

became a God again. He was very near striking Loki for putting him to this humiliation, although the result of it was that Mjolnir was in his hand.'

'Tell me,' said Gangler, 'one of the adventures that Thor was not ashamed of.'

'There are many of them,' said Har, 'in fact there is only one other that he is ashamed of, and that is the adventure with the ferryman.'

'He was travelling alone one day on foot, when he came to a river where there was a ferry, but the ferry-boat was on the other side and the ferryman was standing in it, looking over at Thor but not showing any sign of crossing.

"Hi!" shouted Thor, pretty loudly. There was no answer.

"Hi!" he shouted again, so loud that all the fish in the river gave a start. But the ferryman neither answered nor moved. Thor stood waiting some little time without repeating his call, because he felt quite certain that the man had heard. Then he put one hand on each side of his mouth and yelled. He paused an instant to see whether the ferryman would speak, and then yelled and hallooed his loudest, as if it were a game. When he could shout no longer he stopped. The ferryman said quietly :

"Hullo!"

"Are you deaf?" asked Thor.

"No, but likely to become so if you stay there," said the ferryman.

"What lad are you? You look starved."

"What churl are you?"

"Ferry me over the water, and I will give thee plenty of food to-morrow. I have a basket on my back; there was never better meat; but as I dined on herring

and goat-venison before I started, I do not want it myself."

"An early meal, fellow. But you fed better than you dressed, and I dare say you will have to beg your next meal as you did your clothes, by the look of them."

"Come, bring the boat over. Who owns her?"

"His name is Hildwolf, and he told me to keep her here. He is the shrewd farmer who lives at Radsey Sound. He told me not to ferry over any poachers or horse-thieves or the likes of you, but only good men and such as I knew well. Tell me who you are, if you wish to cross."

"I am Odin's son, Magni's father, the Strong One of the Gods. It is with Thor you are speaking. Now what is your name?"

"Hoarbeard. I never hide my name."

"Why should you, unless you are an outlaw whom all men can insult."

"Even if I were, I should have no fear of such as you."

"It is not a task I like, to wade through the river to get at you. If I did cross I should pay you well for your mockery."

"Well, here I am, waiting for you. You won't come? I know you, Thor, a big strong fellow, with no heart. They talk far too much about you. Do you remember when you were hid in a glove, in deadly fear lest you should sneeze and betray yourself?"

"You are the one with no heart, Hoarbeard, talking like this with a river between you and me. I should be the death of you if I could reach you. But where did you learn to answer so sharply, Hoarbeard?"

"The old Giantesses who live in the burial-mounds were my teachers."

“ Well, your sharpness will do you no good if I get at you.”

“ But you won't, Thor. You had better go back and look after your wife. Really, I never dreamed that a ferryman could stop the mighty Thor.”

“ Now come. Let us give up shouting. Just pull the boat over for me.”

“ Not I ! ”

“ Then tell me another way.”

“ You go on for two hours on that road, and then turn to the left at the stone and keep on till you come to Werland. There you will find your mother, and she will put you on the main road for Odin's country.”

“ Shall I get there to-day ? ”

“ If you walk hard you will get there at sunrise or thereabouts.”

“ And now I will leave you, as you have nothing but mocking for me. But I will pay you back if we meet again.”

“ Go, then, and bad luck to you.”

‘ Was that ferryman a God of some sort in disguise ? ’ asked Gangler.

‘ No ! ’ said Har, ‘ but he was a ferryman, and he was on the other side of the water, which was deep.’

VII

THOR'S DEFEAT

'TELL me,' said Gangler, 'was Thor ever actually beaten either by enchantment or by sheer force?'

'Few would care to say so,' answered Har, 'and yet it is certain that he has often been hard pressed. Had he been altogether worsted no one would mention it, because all are bound to believe that Thor is irresistible.'

'Then apparently I have asked you a question which you either will not or cannot answer?'

'There are rumours,' said Jafnhar, 'but they are not to be believed. Nevertheless, there is one sitting here who can tell thee, and he speaks the truth.'

'I shall gladly listen and satisfy myself whether you can or cannot answer my question, which was, Did any one ever beat Thor by enchantment or by sheer force?'

Thridi now spoke :

'Thy curiosity is natural, but it will be well for thee to be silent about what thou shalt hear.'

'One day Thor set out with Loki upon a journey in his chariot drawn by two goats. At nightfall they stopped and lodged at a peasant's cottage, and for supper Thor killed the goats, skinned them, and put them in the pot. When the meat was ready, the two Gods sat down and invited the peasant and his family to share their supper. When they had finished eating, Thor bade them throw all the bones into the goats' skins which had been spread out near the fireplace, but the

peasant's son, whose name was Thialfi, had lingered over the meal and cracked one of the shank-bones to get at the marrow.

' Thor was up early. The first thing he did was to go over to the skins and bones of the two goats and bless them, lifting up his hammer as he did so. Instantly the living forms of two goats took the place of the torn skins and the bare bones. There was one difference : one of the goats now limped on one of its hind legs. "One of you," said Thor to the peasants, "must have been careless. At least you have broken a bone. See how the poor thing is limping." Thor was angry, knitting his brows and clenching his hand upon his hammer so that his knuckles were white as milk. The peasants were in deadly fear, and the old man said : "Tell us, we beg of you, what we can do to make up for our offence. If we had had any idea what you were going to do with the old bones we should have been wiser and carefuller. Forgive us our folly and disobedience." Thor's anger was over at once when he saw how it had frightened these good people. He spoke kindly to them, but took away with him the boy Thialfi and the girl Roska to serve him, and they do so to this day. He left the goats behind at the cottage, and went on with Loki and his servants.

' They were travelling eastward on the road to Giant-land, and came after many miles to the shores of a great sea. This they crossed and entered a strange country. They had not gone far when they saw before them an immense forest. Here they wandered all day until it was dark. They stopped for the night in a vast hall open at one end, which they found in the midst of the forest. At about midnight they were disturbed in their sleep by an earthquake, which made the floor move

as if it had been water. Thor got up, and called to the others to look with him for a place of safety. They found another room leading out of the hall, and the other three crept into the farthest corner of it. Thor stood at the entrance with his hammer ready in case they were attacked. But nothing happened, except that all through the night something seemed to be groaning horribly close by. At dawn Thor discovered that this was really the snoring of a Giant who lay outside and was still asleep. The God put on his belt to increase his strength, and waited. Presently the Giant awoke, turned sleepily over on to his back looking at Thor, and then rose upright to an enormous height. He did this so rapidly that Thor was as much astonished at it as the peasants were at the bones turning into goats. Doubtless it was his lying down in the night that produced the earthquake. Thor did nothing but ask the Giant his name.

"Skrymir," said the Giant. "I need not ask your name, for I see that you are the God Thor. But what have you been doing with my glove?" As he said this he picked up his glove, which, as was now quite plain, was really what they had supposed to be a hall, while the room which they entered after the earthquake was the thumb of the glove. This was the time when Thor hid in a glove, as the ferryman Hoarbeard reminded him. Skrymir was as amiable as a mountain. He asked if they would care for his company, and when Thor agreed he opened his wallet and had his breakfast. Thor and Loki and their servants also breakfasted, and when they had done so Skrymir said that they had better put all their provisions together, and this they did; the Giant put everything into his wallet, and carried it on his back all day. He walked on in front, and his strides were very

long and very slow, so that Thialfi soon gave up trying to count them. In the evening they found a place under an oak-tree where they could spend the night. Skrymir gave them the wallet that they might have supper, but he himself lay down at once to sleep and to snore.

‘Thor took up the wallet to open it, but the knots in the cord were as impossible to undo as the knots in a stem of ivy. He lost his temper, and catching up the hammer he struck the Giant a two-handed blow on the head. Skrymir slowly awoke, looked round him and said :

“ ‘I think a leaf must have fallen on my head just now. Something disturbed me. Have you had supper ? I suppose I have been to sleep. When are you going to lie down ? ’ ”

“ ‘We are just thinking about it,’ said Thor, and with that he found a place under the next tree and lay down. But he could not sleep. The snoring of Skrymir was like the grunting of a multitude of pigs ; it shook the leaves on the tree overhead, and made the dead ones rise up continually. At last Thor got up and struck the Giant such a blow that the hammer was half buried in his skull. This awakened the Giant, and he cried out :

“ ‘What was that ? was it an acorn touched me on the head ? Hullo, Thor, are you asleep ? ’ ”

“ ‘No,’ said Thor, slipping away. “ ‘You woke me up, Skrymir. It is only just midnight, and I shall go to sleep again.’ ” He made up his mind that his next blow, if the Giant went on snoring, should be a better one. The snoring began again, and this time Thor hit the Giant full in the face. Skrymir awoke and sat up, stroking his cheek.

“ ‘Are there any birds perched on this tree ? I think some moss must have fallen on me. Hullo, Thor ! are

you awake? It is about time for us to be getting up, I should think, though it is not far now to the city of Utgard. I have heard you whispering to one another that I am no Dwarf, not exactly a wren of men; but when you come to Utgard you will see plenty of men taller than Skrymir. Therefore I advise you, when you are there, not to make too much of yourselves: the followers of Utgard-Loki will not stand any bragging from manikins like you, Thor. Perhaps the best thing for you would be to go back the way you have come, but if you will go on take that road to the east. My way is northward among those rocks."

'With these words Skrymir threw the wallet over his shoulders and strode away into the forest, and I never heard that Thor wanted to meet him again.

'The four now gave up all thought of sleep, and took the eastward road until towards noon they saw a city in the middle of the plain before them. It was still some way off, but so high were the buildings they had to bend their heads far back in order to see the tops. When they reached the walls the gateway was closed by a gate which was locked and bolted. Thor tried in vain to open it, but crept with little difficulty between the bars and entered the city with his companions. A large palace stood before them, and as the door was open they went in and saw a number of men sitting on benches in the hall. They were all bigger than Skrymir. The four travellers went up to the king of them and saluted him. The king took no notice of their salutes except to smile with contempt, and say to his companions:

"That stripling must be Thor."

'Then turning to Thor he said:

"Perhaps thou art taller than thou seemest. Canst

thou and thy friends show us any feats? We allow no one here who cannot do something better than other men."

"My feat," said Loki, "is to eat quicker than any one else, as I will show you, if thou hast any one who will race with me."

"That will be a feat, if thou canst do as thou sayest," said Utgard-Loki. "Let us see." He then told one of the men sitting at the far end of the bench, whose name was Logi, to come forth and see whether he could beat Loki. A trough full of meat was placed on the floor: Loki stood at one end and Logi at the other, and each began to eat as fast as he could, and the one who reached the middle first was the winner. Logi ate not only the flesh but the bones and the trough, yet he was first at the middle. It was judged, therefore, that Loki had been beaten.

Utgard-Loki then asked if the young man with Thor had any feat to perform. Thialfi said that he would run a race with any one who came forward.

"If thou canst win the race, that will be a feat truly," said Utgard-Loki, "but we have some clever runners here."

The king and all the company now went to a plain suitable for a running match, and called to a young man named Hugi to race with Thialfi. Hugi ran round once, and so far outstripped Thialfi that he had time to turn round and meet him not far from the starting-place.

"Thou must ply thy legs better than that, Thialfi," said Utgard-Loki, "if thou meanest to win, though I grant that I never saw an outsider run better. Try again."

In the second course Hugi beat Thialfi by a full bow-shot.

' "Thou runnest well," said Utgard, "but thou wilt hardly win, I think. The third course shall decide it."

' So they ran a third time, but Hugi was at the goal when Thialfi was only half-way round, and the spectators cried out that the match was at an end.

' Utgard-Loki next turned to Thor :

' "Now, Thor, how art thou going to show us that thy fame is deserved ? "

' "I will drink with any one," said Thor.

' Utgard-Loki liked this proposal, and led the company back into the hall. There a large horn was brought which his men had to drain when they broke any of the rules of Utgard. The cup-bearer offered it to Thor, and Utgard-Loki said :

' "A good drinker will empty that horn at one draught. Some men will make two draughts of it, and I have seen some who can only finish it in three."

' Thor looked at it and thought it not a very great horn, though it was deep. He was thirsty, and he made little of it, so he set it to his lips. Without drawing breath he began to tilt the horn, and drank as deep as he could and set it down. But when he looked into it to see the bottom he saw only the dark liquor hardly at all diminished.

' "That is very well drunken," said Utgard-Loki, "though nothing much to boast of, and I should not have believed it if any one had told me that Thor could not take a bigger draught. But no doubt thou wilt show us what thou canst do at the second pull."

' Thor said nothing, but set his lips again to the horn and drank with all his might. Nevertheless, when he had to give up he saw that he had drunk rather less than before. The horn, however, could now be carried without spilling the drink.

“ “ How now, Thor ! ” said Utgard-Loki, “ thou must not spare thyself. This is thy own particular feat, remember. If thou wilt drain the horn at the third draught thou must drink deep, and I must say that thy fame will not be justified if thou showest no greater skill in other feats than in this.”

‘ Thor was angry, but he again put the horn to his mouth and did his best to empty it. When he had come to the end of his breath, however, he saw that there was still plenty of drink left, and he gave back the horn to the cup-bearer.

“ “ Well, well ! ” said Utgard-Loki, “ I see that thou art not the man we thought thee. But is there any other feat thou wilt try ? ”

“ “ Yes ! ” said Thor, “ though such draughts as I have taken would not have been reckoned small at Asgard. Wilt thou propose another trial ? ”

“ “ We have a pretty trifling game here,” answered Utgard-Loki, “ which children play at. It is nothing more than lifting my cat from the ground. I should not have thought of mentioning it to Thor if I had not already seen that thou art not the man that we took thee to be.”

‘ As he spoke a large grey cat ran in. Thor put his hand under its middle and did his best to lift it up from the floor, but the cat’s back was only bent with all his efforts ; only one of its feet was off the ground ; and she purred during the whole of the trial. So Thor gave it up.

“ “ That is as I expected,” said Utgard-Loki : “ the cat is large, it is true, but Thor is little compared with us.”

“ “ Ye call me little,” said Thor, “ but is there any one here among ye that will wrestle with me now that I am roused ? ”

"I see no one here," said Utgard-Loki, looking at his men, "who would trouble to wrestle with such as thou ; but let some one call my old nurse, Elli, and she shall wrestle with thee. She has thrown many a man not less mighty than Thor."

'This woman, who was old and toothless, now entered the hall and came to grips with Thor. The more he strained the firmer she stood. He struggled, began to lose his foothold, and finally sank down on one knee. Utgard-Loki said, "Enough ! It is no use going on, Thor, and it is getting late." He showed Thor and his companions to their seats, and they passed the night in feasting.

'Next morning the four got ready to go. Utgard-Loki came in and ordered a meal to be spread for them, and they had abundance of food and drink. When they had finished he led them to the gate of Utgard to see them off. At parting he asked Thor what he thought of the journey. Thor told him that he had got nothing but shame by it. "It grieves me," he said, "to think that ye will remember me as a man of little worth."

"No, no," said Utgard-Loki, "thou art mistaken. What the truth of the matter is I will tell thee now that thou hast left this city, which, so long as I live and can have my way here, thou shalt never enter again. In fact, if I had known beforehand how great thy strength was and how near thou wouldst come to overthrowing me, I should not have admitted thee at all. This is the truth. I have been deceiving thee all this time by illusions and things that are not what they seem. To begin with, I am the Giant Skrymir, or rather the Giant Skrymir was really me, Utgard-Loki. They were my knots, made with iron wire, on the wallet which thou couldst not

undo. It was me thou didst strike with the hammer three times in the forest. The first of these blows was enough to have destroyed me, but though thou couldst not see it I placed a rocky mountain between me and thy hammer, and this I did to save me from each of the three blows. Search that mountain, and thou wilt find in its side three glens, one of them very deep, for it is the mark of thy third blow. I have deceived thee ever since in a similar way. Logi, with whom Loki competed in the eating match, was in reality fire itself : how then could Loki have won ? Hugi, who ran with Thialfi in three races—and marvellously Thialfi ran—was Thought : is there anything swifter ? Now take thy own performances. When thou didst try to empty the horn the feat was an amazing one, such as I should never have believed possible had I not seen it with my own eyes. For one end of the horn was in the sea all the time : if thou goest down to the shore thou wilt learn how much the sea has ebbed after those mighty draughts. The feat with the cat was also wondrous. When we saw thee lifting it so that one of its paws was off the floor, we were all filled with dread, and with good cause ; for this cat was in reality the great serpent which encircles the whole of Midgard under the sea, and when thou hadst thy hand under him he could hardly keep his tail in his mouth, so high up was he lifted towards heaven : if his tail had come out of his mouth no one knows what would be the consequence. As to thy wrestling, that was the most astonishing feat of all. For the crone Elli, whom I called my old nurse, was Old Age ; and there was never yet a man whom she will not sooner or later overthrow, and there never will be ; but thou, Thor, came far nearer to throwing her down than any one else. Now farewell, Thor, and come not again, for if thou dost

I shall defend myself with other deceits, and thou never canst prevail against them."

'Thor was not to be flattered. All this time his rage had been increasing, and he lifted up his hammer at these last words to strike Utgard-Loki. But Utgard-Loki was not there. He looked for the city of Utgard, and it had disappeared: there was nothing left on the green plain for Thor to destroy. He could do nothing, therefore, but return home to his palace, vowing as he journeyed that he would make another attack on the Midgard serpent.'

VIII

THOR'S VICTORIES

'AND what,' asked Gangler, 'what came of Thor's vow to make another attack on the Midgard serpent?'

'It is,' said Har, 'no use concealing the fact from you. Thor had no peace when he got back to Asgard. He could think of nothing but Utgard and all his failures there, particularly of the cat which was really the Midgard serpent, the wolf's brother. He went about striking the air with his hammer. "Why," they asked, "dost thou strike at nothing, O Thor?"'

"For an excellent reason," he replied; "because Utgard-Loki has changed himself into nothing."

'But whether or not these blows did any harm to Utgard-Loki no God knoweth. Before long Thor himself tired of it, and left home secretly, without taking any companion or even his goats and chariot. He put on the likeness of a young man and so he travelled until dark, when he came to the dwelling of Hymir, one of the Giants. He saluted the Giant and asked for a night's lodging, which was readily granted to him, because the house was huge and he was small. At break of day, when he saw Hymir making ready his boat for fishing, he got up and begged the Giant to let him come on board and take an oar.

"A shrivelling such as thou art would not be much use," said the Giant. "Besides, thou wilt catch thy death of cold out there, if I stay as long as usual."

"I am not afraid of that," said Thor. "I will go

out as far as thou wishest, and perhaps it will not be I that will want to turn back again." He was very nearly attacking the Giant there and then, but he kept himself in hand because he had other fish to fry at that time.

"What bait shall we use, Hymir?" he said, as if he were thinking of nothing else.

"Find your own bait," answered the Giant.

Thor found his own bait. He ran up from the shore to where the Giant's cattle were feeding, and picking out the largest bull, which was coal-black, he wrung off its head and carried it down to the boat without a word. Hymir made a wry face when he saw the black bull's head, but he said nothing. They then put out to sea. Each of them had two oars, and the God pulled so that they could feel the boat being lifted along, which astonished the Giant very much.

"That will do," said Hymir; "this is a good place for flounders."

"Oh no," said Thor, "we will go on a good bit farther than this while we are about it;" and he continued to row.

They went on for a great distance, and Thor showed no signs of being satisfied, when Hymir called out:

"Easy now, my lad; if thou art not careful we shall be alongside the Midgard serpent, and then we shall know it. We shall both be provided for."

Thor took no notice whatever, but rowed on and on until he thought fit to stop. At last he did so, and laid down his oars. Both began to fish, and at first Hymir had all the sport. He was always either throwing out his line or pulling it in again with a whale, and often two whales, at the end. Thor had taken out a fishing-line and hook of suitable size, and cast it far out to sea

with the bull's head for a bait. For a long time his line hung loose and curved in the water, and Thor watched Hymir. At last the line straightened out and grew stiff and tight. And now it may be said with truth that Thor deceived the Midgard serpent as thoroughly as it had deceived him at Utgard. The monster let go of his tail and caught greedily at the bait, and would have swallowed it had not the hook caught fast in his jaw. The pain made the serpent shake his head, and the shaking of his head caused the boat to rock to and fro. Thor had to hold on to the line with all his might. Once he loosened his grasp for an instant, and, gripping the line as it was running out, he was dragged to the edge and his knuckles all skinned against the gunwale. If he could have had sport like this every day, he thought, when he had got over this slip, he would have been a fisherman all his life. The Giant, on the other hand, would willingly have changed places with Thor at any other time : at that moment he wished either that Thor was at the bottom of the sea or that he himself was at home. It seemed, however, unlikely that Thor would go to the bottom, unless he took the boat and the Giant with him. Thor was pulling his hardest, and the serpent was doing the same, and with the pressure of the God's feet against the bottom of the boat the planks were creaking. At last they creaked still more, cracked, splintered, and altogether gave way. Thor's feet went clean through to the bottom of the sea, and as he now had firmer foothold he was able to haul the serpent up to the edge of the boat, and its dark head stuck out through the foam with which it had covered the sea like froth on ale. Thor looked at the serpent with equal anger and satisfaction ; his eyes flashed with crystal flames ; and once he struck the monster on the ear

with his fist. The serpent replied by spirting venom. Hymir had nothing to do but to expect the worst, unless indeed the serpent would swallow Thor and leave him his boat. But as this seemed very unlikely the Giant had to act for himself. Thor was just about to strike the serpent on the head with his hammer when the Giant cut the line. The blow fell, but whether it fell faster than the serpent no one has yet decided. Some assert that the hammer reached the serpent under the water and struck off its head. Others are equally certain that the serpent is still alive at the bottom of the sea. The only person who knows is the one who recovered the hammer. Those who believe that the serpent is alive, and those who believe that he is not, agree on one thing : that the hook is in the serpent's jaw, alive or dead. But if the fate of the Midgard serpent is unknown, that of the Giant Hymir is well known, because Thor told it himself. In anger at losing the serpent, Thor struck the owner of the boat a blow that sent him into the sea, and from there to a place where they have no boats and no need of them. Thor himself, pulling his legs out of the holes of the boat, waded to the land, returned to Asgard and told the story which you have now heard.'

'Dost thou think,' asked Gangler, 'that the serpent swallowed the bullock's head after all?'

'It never occurred to me to think about it,' said Har.

'But now that thou dost think about it, what is thy opinion?' persisted Gangler.

'I do not know,' answered Har, 'but this I know, that questions are easier than answers, except to me, for I never ask questions.'

'Now that thou hast told him that story of Hymir,' said Jafnhar, 'I will tell him the other story of Thor and Hymir. Perhaps this Hymir was another Giant of

the same name: at any rate, as I know the story Thor did not kill him.

'The Gods were going away after their first feast in the hall of Eager, the Sea Giant. The guests had been too many and too grand for Eager, and he was glad to see them go; he was a simple fellow, and it was quite plain to see that he was glad. But Thor did not like to see a man smiling with the pleasure of getting rid of him; so he said:

"We shall come back again soon, Eager, and often too. Your smile does me good."

"I did not ask you," said Eager, "but if you come, you can bring with you a cauldron big enough to brew ale for the lot of you. I haven't one."

"Oh, certainly," said Thor, thinking it an easy thing. But it was not. None of the Gods knew of such a cauldron. It was from Tyr that he heard of one at last. Said Tyr:

"My grim father Hymir is the man. He lives east of the Sleet Bays, at the ends of heaven, and he has a cauldron a mile deep."

"Can we get it?" asked Thor.

"Yes," said Tyr, "but we shall have to think of a way."

"The two together rode a long day's journey, and put up the goats at Egil's house. Egil was Tyr's uncle. Then they went on to Hymir's hall. Tyr's grandmother was there, an old woman with nine hundred heads, whom Tyr did not like at all. But presently his mother came out, and she was a grand woman. She offered Tyr a beer-cup, saying:

"Child of Giants! I will hide you two adventurers under the cauldron. Father is often sharp and savage with his guests."

' Therefore they hid themselves under one of the eight cauldrons on a high shelf in the hall. Hymir came home late from hunting. Icicles clattered at the end of his chin-thicket—or beard, as you would say—and he had a toothache.

" " Good evening, Hymir ! " said his wife. " Don't be angry. Thy son has come, whom we have long been looking for. He has brought with him the Giant Killer—you know—the friend of man, I should say. There they are up there on the shelf, behind the pillar."

' The Giant turned to look at them, and at the mere look the shelf gave way and down fell eight cauldrons. Thor and Tyr were left with no cover at all, close to the Giant : he was looking hard at Thor, for he could not expect any good from him who makes Giantesses widows. But for the present nothing happened except that Hymir ordered three oxen to be killed and put in the pot to boil, for he was fond of boiled beef. Thor, however, ate all three before he fell asleep. As he left the bones, and the heads had been cut off before boiling, Hymir did not starve, though he said :

" " We three shall want supper again to-morrow, I suppose."

' Thor said he would like a day's fishing. What happened Thor must have known. You have heard one story, that tells how he nearly caught the Midgard serpent who escaped because Hymir cut the line, and how he pitched the Giant into the sea for his pains. But this story says that Hymir caught whales and Thor lost the serpent, and thus they came home together. When they landed Hymir said :

" " Now do your part. Either carry the whales up or house the ship."

' Thor stepped forward and caught up the ship under

one arm and carried it, with the whales in it, up the steep pathway among the rocks to where the Giant lived.

' At supper that evening they were talking about feats of strength. The Giant was not willing to admit that Thor was stronger than ordinary. "A man may pull a good oar as Thor does, but what I should call a strong man is one who could break this vat, now."

' At this he tapped the vat with his knuckles. Thor took it up and threw it with all his might, so that it broke through one of the pillars; but the vat itself was brought back to him unbroken. He threw it a second time, and the same thing happened. "I will tell you what to do," whispered the Giant's lady: "dash it down on Hymir's skull; it is harder than the vat." Thor acted on this advice. He moved along the bench towards his host, as if to throw in another direction, and then swinging the vat overhead, instead of letting it go, he brought it down on the back of the Giant's skull. The vat was broken; the skull remained as before, except that it was full of regret for the good wine which ran out of the broken vat on to the floor. The Giant was half crying over the waste of wine. Then he thought of another test for the strength of Thor. "Can you carry my ale cauldron out of the hall?" said he.

"Very gladly," said Thor. Tyr was the first to try, but he could not even lift up its rim, which lay on the floor as it had fallen from the shelf. Thor drove his feet through the floor before he could fairly raise up the cauldron, which he then put on his head like a hat. The pothooks rattled about his head as he walked off with it out of the hall. As he remained outside for some time, Hymir, who had forgotten him for the moment and had been looking at the wine-vat, got up to see what was happening, half hoping to find Thor

buried under the cauldron. Instead of which, he saw the two already mounting on Thor's chariot with the cauldron. He called together his fellow Giants and started in pursuit. Many of them got near enough to Thor to be killed by his hammer, but none got any nearer. And thus Thor brought home a cauldron large enough for Eager to brew drink for all the Gods. 'They say that Thor drinks ale at Eager's once every harvest-time.'

IX

THOR'S VICTORIES (*continued*)

THEN said Gangler :

' Thor must have killed many a Giant. Whenever he was swinging his hammer there seems to have been a Giant's head in the way of it. Yet I cannot understand why the Giants did not join together to destroy him. They knew his habits perfectly well. Old Hymir, for example, addressed him as the one who makes Giantesses widows. Why, then, did they not make an end of Thor ? '

' They were unable to,' said Har.

' But why ? ' asked Gangler.

' Something prevented them,' answered Har.

' And what was that something ? Was it the Norns, or what ? '

' I do not know, except that such is the fact.'

' Had he any more adventures among Giants ? '

' Many. I will tell you one more, and it is remarkable because Thor was without his own hammer, belt, and gauntlets.'

' How was that ? '

' It was Loki's fault. He was flying hither and thither as he often did, wearing Freya's hawk-skin, purely for a pastime, and catching sight of Garfred's garth he flew that way. When he saw the hall he descended and perched at a window to look in. Garfred the Giant was sitting inside in great comfort, but looked up and saw a bird ; and he told a man to catch the bird. The man was some time climbing up the wall,

which was both high and difficult. Loki looked on, thinking it sport to see the man taking so much trouble all for nothing. He stayed until the last moment before flying away, and when he spread his wings he found that his talons were already fast in the hands of the man. He had got sleepy with watching the slow climb, and so he was caught and taken to the Giant Garfred. When he looked into the hawk's eyes Garfred thought that it was really a man—for no bird ever had eyes as clever as Loki's or as wicked—and he said: "There is a man's spirit behind this hawk's plumage. Who are you?" Loki made no reply. The Giant was not deceived, and instead of setting the bird free he shut it up in a chest, to see whether starvation would sharpen its wit and give it a voice. And so it did. In three months' time Loki would have said anything in the hope of getting free. Garfred had him taken out of the chest, and bade him talk. Loki declared at once who he was, and said that he wished to be set free.

"What will you do if I set you free?" asked Garfred.

"What do you want?" asked Loki.

"You are very obliging," said Garfred. "Now what I should like most of all is to have Thor here without his hammer, without his belt, and without his mittens. I want to discover whether the hammer, the belt, and the mittens are what makes Thor so powerful and famous; whether he is anything at all by himself."

"I will do what you wish," said Loki, and he was set free. After eating and drinking, he set off to Asgard, and when he met Thor he told him a tale:

"Thor," he said, "I have just come from a Giant's palace, where they showed me a most curious thing which they called Thor."

“ A thing ? ” said Thor.

“ Yes, and not a very big thing. It belongs to the Giant Garfred, who is very old and has this one joke. When anybody comes to see him he says, ‘ You did not notice Thor.’ ”

“ ‘ Thor ? ’ ” says the guest, in some alarm.

“ ‘ Oh, you may well be afraid of the thing,’ says Garfred; ‘ there it is, and now you may say that you have seen Thor and found him not a very terrible fellow.’ ”

“ And what is *it* ? ” asked Thor.

“ It is a hammer with a gauntlet on each end and a girdle round the middle. Garfred says that those are Thor, and that without them you are nothing. At least, he says that he has never heard any proof to the contrary.”

“ Where is Garfred’s garth ? ” asked Thor.

“ I will show you. It is a smooth, easy way.”

‘ And so they set out. It was not smooth or easy, but Thor was in a hurry. They stayed one night with a Giantess named Grith. Thor had met her before, and since he had made her a widow. He did not know that she lived here, and was delighted to see her again. He told her his errand, how he was going to teach Garfred who Thor was. “ But where is your hammer ? where is your belt ? where are the gauntlets ? ”

“ That is the point,” said Thor. “ I am going without them, to show that Thor is not made by his hammer, belt, and gauntlets.”

“ But if I were you,” said the good widow, “ I would take something. I can lend you a pair of gauntlets, a belt, and an oak staff. You will be quite safe with them.”

“ Safe ! ” said Thor, angrily.

"I mean," she said, "that these things are very useful, though of course they are nothing like your own. Garfred is a clever sort of giant, and very thickset. You may just as well keep your hands clean. Then the staff will be handy in crossing the rivers farther on. This girdle, again, takes up no room and looks well."

Thor did not thank her for the gifts, but took them with him next morning. He and Loki had to cross many a swollen river as full of tumbling stones as of water coming down from the mountains, rolling even the slippery round boulders which the Gods were scrambling on. The worst river of all was Wimmer. Before Thor had got to the middle of it the water was beating upon his shoulders. He was glad enough then of the girdle, which seemed to him to give strength like his own girdle. Loki clung to it and got nothing worse than a wetting. The staff supported him against the moving wall of waters. Working his way across, he cried :

"Do your worst, Wimmer. I am wading through to Giantland, and will not be stopped. The higher you rise the greater will be my strength and the deeper your shame."

As he stood still balancing himself almost in mid-stream, he caught sight of a Giant maiden, Gialp, one of Garfred's daughters. She was in a glen close by, making the river rise by means of spells. So Thor took a great stone out of the river and cast it at her. Thor never missed what he aimed at. The water began to sink, and he made his way steadily to the bank. A certain rowan-tree overhung the water, and grasping it he climbed up on to the land, at a little distance from Garfred's hall. They were shown first into the goat-house, and Thor supposed that this was because he was unrecognized ; for he had no suspicion that Loki had decoyed

him there to keep the oath he had sworn. Thor was sitting down on a stool, waiting for something to happen, when he felt the stool and himself being reared up towards the roof. He would have gone through it, if he had not used the rod of Grith in time. He held the point of it against the roof and pressed hard so as to thrust the stool back again. Slowly the stool began to descend, but not at all smoothly, and at last something cracked and a great shriek was heard, and the stool fell to the ground. Thor fell on his feet, and there under the stool he saw the Giant's daughters, with their backs broken.

'It seemed to Thor time for him to be going into the hall, and as he was starting a messenger met him, asking him to come. He followed the messenger into the hall, which was a cave lighted by a forge fire and by the eyes of Giants sitting round it.

' "Who are you?" said Garfred, the chief of the Giants.

' "Thor," said Thor, and the Giants roared with laughter.

' "Where are your hammer, belt, and gauntlets? Thor is not Thor without them."

' "I left them in Asgard," said Thor, "knowing that I was coming to a place where I should be safe enough, but where those precious things might be stolen."

' "Hail, Thor!" said Garfred, and took up from the forge a bar of iron so hot that it burnt the eyes of the Giants and they dripped tears on to the stones at their feet. He swung this burning bar at Thor with all his might. The faces of a thousand Giants watching were lighted up by it for a moment like rows of moons, as it rushed through the hall. Thor waited for it and caught it in the iron gauntlets. His face shone like Balder's

as he held it, but the Giants knew well that it was Thor. He smiled, thinking of Grith and her counsel. Then he hurled back the bar. Garfred was hidden behind one of the pillars of the hall, but the bar found him out through the pillar; it pierced his body and then the wall behind. The broken pillar fell upon the remains of the Giant and the roof followed, catching fire from the forge. The crowd of Giants were now mad with fear, between the fire at one end and Thor invisible at the other. Many rushed into the fire. Some of those who were undecided were knocked down by the rush; others were hustled and began to fight amongst themselves; and now here, now there, Thor and the rod of Grith made themselves felt without being seen. There was anger and there was fear among the Giants, but there was no courage. One moment a Giant would be shrieking with fear because he thought Thor was behind him; the next moment, finding that he was safe, he was bellowing with anger at the Giant in front of him for having been in his way; and then the two fought until they were separated by a common fear of the destroyer. Thor slew those who stood up; the rest were trampled to death or slew one another. The fire was quenched in the blood. The victory was Thor's; yet he had fought with no help from Mjolnir, or the belt, or the gauntlets.'

'What about Grith's rod, and her belt and her gauntlets?' said Gangler.

'They were not the same thing,' said Har.

X

GODS AND GODDESSES

‘ALL thy tales,’ said Gangler, ‘are of Odin or Thor or Loki. Have the other Gods ever done anything except rule the world with the help of the Norns?’

‘It is not lawful to tell everything about the Gods to a man,’ said Har.

‘I should like to hear what is lawful, if it is worth hearing.’

‘I will tell thee of some Anses and some Wanes, for those are the two races of Gods. For a long time they were at war and fought many battles, but they made peace at last, after both sides had won victories. To make the peace good each side spat into a jar. Out of this the Gods made a being whom they called Kvasir; he was made so wise that no one could ask him a question which he could not answer. Kvasir travelled over the whole world to teach men wisdom, but was murdered at length by two Dwarfs. They killed him because they believed they would thus be able to get at all his wisdom instead of having only what he chose to give. If he could give wisdom, they said, he must have it; and if he has it, it must be inside him, for he goes from place to place with nothing else but his clothes. So they drained Kvasir’s blood and mixed it with honey. Whoever drinks of this blood and honey becomes a poet. The Dwarfs did not long keep the secret to themselves. They gave out that Kvasir had been choked by his own too great wisdom, because he had not been asked enough

questions. But instead of living quietly on wisdom and blood and honey, they killed a Giant and his wife who had no wisdom. Their son, whose name was Suttung, took revenge on the Dwarfs. He carried them out to sea, and then left them on a sandbank which was covered at high tide. They begged him to set them free, offering to pay him with the drink that makes poets. Suttung, though a Giant, agreed to this, and gave the precious goblet to the care of his daughter Gunnlauth. Poetry is sometimes called Kvasir's blood, Suttung's mead, or the Dwarfs' ransom.

' But this mead did not long remain with the Giants. 'Odin himself went on a journey alone to Giantland to gain it. As he journeyed he came to a meadow where nine men were mowing. He said " Good morning ", and had a talk with them about mowing. He knew the best way to sharpen a scythe, he said, and offered to sharpen theirs. This they gladly allowed him to do. When he had finished they found that their scythes would cut grass as if it were air, and they begged him to sell the whetstone. Instead of selling it, Odin threw the whetstone up into the air for them to scramble for it. But they were so eager to catch it that they did not put down their scythes. The result was that they all killed one another with the blades. Odin left them there, and put up for the night with Suttung's brother, Baugi, who was complaining how he had lost nine men in one day, and had no one to finish cutting his hay. Odin, who went by the name of Baulverk, offered to take the place of the nine men, if he might have a drink of Suttung's mead at the end of his work. Baugi promised that he should, and Odin stayed with him until the end of the hay harvest, working hard. Baugi now went to get the mead from his brother ; but Suttung would not

let him have one drop. Odin therefore made up his mind to go himself to the cavern where Gunnlauth kept it. This cavern had no entrance anywhere. But Baugi bored a hole in the rock, and Odin crept through it in the form of a worm. Once inside, he became a God again, and stood before the solitary and astonished Gunnlauth. She could not refuse him ; she offered him a draught from each of the three jars where the mead was stored ; and he drank so deep that not a drop was left in any one of them. Thanking Gunnlauth and bidding her farewell, he crawled out again from the cavern. Once outside, he took the form of an eagle in order to escape as swiftly as possible. Suttung was not long in discovering the trick, and followed him in the form of another eagle. The Gods watched the race from the rocks of Asgard. As soon as Odin alighted they brought out jars, which he filled through his beak. This is the true draught of poets, and poetry is sometimes called Odin's booty, Odin's gift, or the drink of the Gods.'

' But thou wast speaking of Anses and Wanes,' said Gangler.

' Odin is the chief of the Anses, and all his children and descendants are Anses, all of the Gods in fact, except Frey and Freya and their father Niord, who are Wanes. Niord was originally sent to Asgard as a hostage, but he never returned to the Wane-world where he was born. His kingdom is Noatun, which is in heaven. He is a kindly God, without guile. He rules the winds, so far as he can, and checks the fury of the sea and of fire. Fishermen particularly pray to Niord. He has treasures without end, and makes rich some of those who pray to him. When a man is rich it is said that " Frey and Niord have blessed him with a store of wealth ". Niord married Skadi, daughter of Thiassi,

one of the Mountain Giants. She wished always to live among the mountains where she was born, and Niord went for a time to live there with her. But he liked the sea best ; he became sad among the mountains, where he heard wolves instead of swans. So it was agreed that he and his wife should spend nine days in the mountains and then three by the sea. But Skadi could not sleep for the screaming of the sea-birds, and she left the sea and went back again to the mountains. There she is happy in her father's old house, or chasing the wild beasts with her bow and arrows over the snow. Niord is a gentle God. No one was insulted worse than he by Loki when the Gods were feasting after the death of Balder. Loki scoffed at him for being a Wane, and Niord answered : " It is my comfort that though I came here as a hostage, yet I had a son here whom no one hates, and who is best of the Anses."

' This son of Niord is the God who is called " the bright Frey ", the blessed son of Niord. He is also called " the bright slayer of Beli " because he once slew a great Giant of that name. He is the God of rain and sunshine and of all the fruits of the earth, and he dwells in Elfheim. Men who wish to have good harvests and to preserve or gain peace, offer prayers to Frey. Like his father Niord, he gives men riches. He rides sometimes a horse called Bloodyhoof, sometimes a boar with golden tusks, which he was riding at Balder's funeral. Frey has lost his sword, and will be without it when the last battle is fought. There is a tale which explains this.

' His mother Skadi had noticed that for some time Frey had been moody and silent. Thinking he must be angry about something, she asked Skirni, his old friend, if he knew what was the matter. But Skirni said that

if he said a word to him Frey blazed up in a fury. However, Skadi persuaded him to go again.

“Tell me, O Frey, thou captain of the Gods,” said Skirni, “why thou, my lord, sittest all day long alone in thy hall.”

“How can I tell thee, my lad, this heavy sorrow? The sun shines day by day, but brings me no joy.”

“Can thy grief be too great to tell me, Frey, though we have known one another since we were boys?”

“I went up into Lidskialf the other day and looked over the world, and towards the north I saw a maid crossing Gymir's field. Whether it was her beauty which lighted up the sea with its brightness, or whether it was being on Odin's throne, I have been sad ever since. I love her, but neither the Gods nor the Elves will let us be together.”

Skirni asked Frey to lend him his sword and his horse which would go through fire, and then rode away. In his dark ride over the boggy hills of OGRELAND, Skirni kept up his courage by talking to the horse. At last he saw a Giant shepherd sitting on a mound, and asked how he could see the maid in spite of Gymir's hounds. The shepherd thought he must be mad or else a ghost, to think of such a thing. Skirni answered that he was not afraid, but in great haste. With the shepherd's help he found the hall of Gymir. Gerda was inside sitting down, while a bondmaid was at work. She heard him clattering in the court. “What is that clattering clatter?” said she. “It is a man. He is getting off his horse. The horse is grazing now,” said the bondmaid. “Go,” said Gerda, “invite him into the hall to refresh himself with some of our clear mead.” She was small, and rather dark than fair; she was merry and contented, but with fits of bad temper because the bondmaid, her

only companion, was stupid. When Skirni came in she said in astonishment :

“ Which one of the sons of the Gods can this be? How ever didst thou get over the huge fire outside, young man? ”

“ I am not one of the Gods,” said Skirni, “ though I did get through thy fire. I have come with these eleven apples of gold to win thy love for Frey.”

“ I will not have thy eleven apples,” said she, “ never ; not for any one’s love ; nor will I ever love Frey, with or without his apples.”

“ I will give thee Balder’s ring, that yields eight other rings exactly like it every ninth night.”

“ I want no rings, whether they were taken from Balder’s body or not. We have plenty of gold here.”

‘ Skirni hesitated. Gerda laughed at him. This made up his mind for him.

“ Look on this blade,” he said, showing her the sword, “ I will cut thy head off with it, unless thou change thy mind.”

‘ Gerda knew well enough that he would do nothing of the kind, though she disliked the look of the sword. “ I am not going to be driven to love any man,” she said, “ and if thou and Gymir meet, it will be his turn to threaten.”

“ Not so,” said Skirni, “ but I will keep this sword for the old man. I have a magic wand that will be better for thee. It will send thee where no man can see thee, but the Giants will ; and there thou shalt sit on a mound looking towards Hell. Thou shalt loathe thy meat, and yet thou shalt eat it because thou hast not the courage to die.”

‘ Gerda was going to slip away. For he said it in such a way that she believed it. But she could not escape, and he went on :

“ The demons shall pinch thee every day in Giantland. Thou shalt never know what love is, though maybe thou shalt have a three-headed monster for a husband. Yet thou shalt linger on and on like a dead thistle. The Gods hate thee. Even Frey shall hate thee. Come here, ye Giants ! ye Frost Giants ! and all ye Gods ! come and hear me swear that Gerda shall never be loved again.”

‘ Gerda would have cried had she been alone, but instead of that she fetched a goblet and offered it to Skirni, saying :

“ Hail now, lad, and take this cup of old mead ! ”

‘ Skirni was thirsty with his anger, and drank it up. Gerda watched him. Presently she spoke, half to herself :

“ I never thought to love one of the Anses.”

‘ Skirni caught her up :

“ But I must have an answer to take back. When wilt thou meet the bright son of Niord ? ”

“ In three days’ time,” she answered, “ at Barra.”

“ Good,” said he, “ now that is sensible. I should like to drink thy health in another goblet of that excellent mead.” The goblet was filled and filled again, and yet a third time, before he rode away singing. Frey saw him from afar off and cried out, asking for the news. When he heard it he did not even thank Skirni, but went away into a solitary place and raved because he had three days to wait. Yet those three days passed away, and Gerda was true to her promise. But he never had back his sword, and that is why he had to slay Beli with a stag’s horn. He will miss the sword in earnest when the sons of Muspell march against the Gods.’

‘ Tell me about Frey’s sister, Freya,’ said Gangler.

‘ First I will tell thee about Frigga, Odin’s wife, though as she is very grand there is not much to say about her.

She keeps to her own home and has no adventures. Yet she is so renowned that Odin is sometimes called "Frigga's husband" or "Frigga's love". She was the mother of Balder, and she lives at Fensaler.

'Freya is a very great Goddess, and her palace is called Folkvang. She shares the dead with Odin. Half go to her and half to him. Sometimes she flies in her chequered hawk-dress of feathers: sometimes she rides in a car drawn by two cats. She first taught the Gods enchantments, which she learnt from the Wanes. Her chief adventure was when she did not go to be the bride of the Giant Thrym, which I have already told. The Giant exclaimed: "Look, Giants, stand up and look. They are bringing me my wife, Freya, the daughter of Niord of Noatun." But he was mistaken, and more than disappointed, for he was shortly slain. Freya is married, but her husband, whose name is Odur, left her to travel into a very distant country, where he has remained. He left behind him one beautiful daughter, named Hnossa. Freya is sad and often weeps. But she is still beautiful, and her necklace, called Brising, is the most famous of all necklaces. She weeps for loss of love, but she is fond of hearing love-songs, and listens kindly to prayers when lovers make them.

'Lofna is another Goddess who is mild and gracious, particularly to lovers, and her name means love and whatsoever is lovely and lovable.

'Vora is the Goddess who listens to all oaths, and punishes those that break them. Nothing is hidden from her.

'There is Sif also, who is the wife of Thor. She thought to escape Loki's tongue at the banquet by offering him a cup of mead; but he took the mead, and she got the insult in spite of it.

‘And there are many other Goddesses, but the more like Gods and the less like human beings they are, the less there is to say about them.’

‘Tell me,’ said Gangler, ‘about the other Gods.’

‘I have spoken of Tyr. He alone of the Gods cares to feed Fenrir the wolf, and it was he who made sure of fettering the wolf and lost his hand for his pains. He is as brave as Thor; perhaps braver, for he has not Thor’s strength, having only one hand. A one-handed man is often called a Tyr. He gives courage to men, and it is a good thing for a warrior to pray to Tyr. He makes up for his lack of Thor’s strength by great wisdom, and a wise man is said to be as wise as Tyr, while a valiant man is said to be as valiant as Tyr. It was he that told Thor where he could find the cauldron big enough to brew ale for all the Gods.

‘There is Heimdall, who is also called the White God. His palace is Himinbiorg, which is at the end of the bridge Bifrost. He guards this bridge, and is called the glad watchman of the Gods. Few others would be glad in that solitary, remote, and dangerous position. He will be the first to be attacked by the sons of Muspell. But until then he sits drinking the goodly mead in the peaceful hall of Himinbiorg, which is as peaceful as the grave. Loki taunted him with having a dull life and a wet back. But he is so contented, and so loves mead, that he does not feel either the dullness or the wet back. His back is wet with going out from time to time to look over towards Giantland. Others call him foolish, but those who do so could never do his work. They would either leave it or go mad, both foolish things. Heimdall needs less sleep than a bird, and mead cannot make him drowsy. He sees a hundred miles around him by night or day. He can hear whatever sound there is,

even to the grass growing in the earth, and the wool growing on a sheep's back. He keeps a horn in the hall, and some day he will blow it.

'There is Vidar, surnamed the Silent, the son of Thor and Grith. He wears thick shoes made out of all the shreds of leather thrown away by shoemakers; so that these shreds are not wasted as men suppose. He is very strong. It was Vidar who made way for Loki at the banquet where he insulted everybody. It is said of him and another God, Wali, that they will inhabit the city of the Gods when the fire of Surtur is quenched.

'Ullur is another God. He is supreme in archery and skating. He is handsome and a good warrior. Were he not a God he would be a fine man, but as he is a God he will live for ever, or until Ragnarok.

'There is also Bragi, the God who is a poet and has a beautiful wife. Another is Forseti, the son of Balder and Nanna. He lives in the mansion called Glitnir, and he is such a judge that all who bring their cases to him for trial go away content. He himself is at peace and he gives peace to men.'

'How?' asked Gangler.

'At Glitnir thou mayest answer that question thyself.'

'I am too old to go to Glitnir,' said Gangler, but Har did not hear.

XI

THE APPLES OF YOUTH, AND THE DAY OF DOOM

'Who is Bragi's beautiful wife?' asked Gangler, not because he wished to know, but because he hoped to keep up the conversation and learn something of importance.

'Her name,' said Har, 'is Iduna. She is one of the eight Goddesses who sit in hall with the twelve Gods. She is the loveliest and the youngest, and by her appearance she seems always to be nineteen years old; and needless to say that as she looks so young she is also wise. She has a secret which none of the other Gods has ever learnt, nor, I think, has she—the secret of everlasting happiness. She is called the sorrow-healing Maiden. She keeps the Gods' Elixir of Youth, and if she lost it or refused to give it to them they would at once feel the weight of all the ages of their lives: their backs would bend, their hair would grow grey and fall out, and their eyes would be like shellfish and good for nothing except to see causes for misery. This elixir is the juice of certain apples which Iduna alone possesses. They look like ordinary apples, and she gathers them off an old apple-tree in a wood full of such trees. Others have stolen into the wood and taken away many apples, but never any like Iduna's, though they look and taste well enough. Yet Iduna will take a God out with her into the wood and pick an apple for one without any secrecy. Possibly it is Iduna's own touch that gives her apples

this power of healing sorrow and renewing youth. I do not know. . . .'

'I wonder,' said Gangler to himself, 'if a beautiful woman's touch could have such power?' He remembered the day when he thought it could. He and his men had sailed far away among the islands of the West fighting and plundering, and at last they had landed in Wales. All day they fought among the grey rocks and grey trees at the foot of a mountain whose top they never saw for mist. The brook a little below them ran silent because of the dead men that had fallen into it over the rocks. But at last they could not see the enemy any more, and at evening they came to where the brook ran into a broad river. The two waters almost encircled an orchard, and the last light of the sun was shining on the trees, which were the oldest Gangler had ever seen. Their twigs were so dense, and the lichen was so furry on the twigs, that each tree looked like a magpie's nest, except that it was spotted with golden apples. There was a girl gathering the apples, and she looked at Gangler and his men carelessly, as men look at animals, without kindness or unkindness, and she tossed apples over the river, and laughed to see the strange men picking them up. But because one of the men leapt into the water to go to her she slipped away among her trees. The man searched for her in vain. None of them saw her any more. So when the man who had swum over came back, the king slew him in a great fit of anger. A cold wind blew, and the mist from the mountains hid the orchard. Gangler sighed as he heard the voice of Har saying :

'There is no one whom the Gods would miss more than Iduna, and they never felt so much shame as when Loki spoke vilely to her.'

'Loki was the cause of her only woe. He and Odin and another once took a journey together. They went over the wildest hills and through the darkest forests, and it was not long before they were without food. When, therefore, they caught sight of a herd of oxen feeding in one of the greener dales among the hills, they were not slow in killing one. They lit a fire and put the ox in a pot over the fire to stew. When Loki thought it should be done he tried it, but found it far from ready. They gave it another hour before they tried it again, and it was as raw as before. Yet the fire was good enough. Then they began to talk about the matter, to get at the cause of this strange thing. As they talked they heard a voice overhead in an oak-tree, and the voice said that he knew the reason why the ox-flesh was not cooked. They looked up and saw that it was an old eagle, and not a little one, sitting in the oak. Said the eagle: "If ye will give me my fill of the ox the meat will be done," and though he was a great eagle they consented to give him his fill. As soon as he heard them say "Yes" he came down for his share, since he had no liking for cooked meat. He seized one thigh and both shoulders of the ox, and would have flown up to his perch with them. But Loki had a quick eye for the knavery of others. Moreover he had been looking after the fire, so, snatching up a great stick, he struck the bird with all his might across the back. The eagle rose up in the air with the stick fast in his back at one end and in Loki's hands at the other. Loki could not get free, and was dragged along over the tops of trees and rocks until he thought that his legs would be broken off and his arms torn from his shoulders. He did not suffer any the less because he was fat. He cried out to be set free, but the eagle said that Loki should never be free unless he

brought Iduna and her apples at a certain time out of Asgard. Loki, who would have promised anything, consented, although he knew well that the eagle was really the Giant Thiazzi. He was set free and he returned to his companions, boasting that he had outwitted the eagle, but saying nothing about his promise.

‘When they got back to Asgard, Loki waited until the appointed time and then persuaded Iduna to come out into a wood where he said that he had found some apples equal to her own. “Bring some of thine with thee, Iduna,” he said, “so that we may compare them together.” Iduna smiled at this, for, she said, “My apples are known by their powers, not their looks, and their powers no one has ever doubted.” “That is true, Iduna,” said Loki, “but nevertheless bring some of thine, because these in the wood seem to me to be of the same shape and colour as well as the same power.” Iduna was not to be deceived, yet took some apples with her to avoid Loki’s nasty tongue. But when they were in the wood down flew the Giant Thiazzi and picked her up with the apples and carried her off. The hoary Giants of the rocks were glad when Iduna came amongst them.

‘In Asgard the Gods missed her’ at once. The sun was not the same thing now that Iduna was gone: nothing was the same. They began to feel their age, and they called a council to consider what had happened and what should be done. It came out at once that Iduna had last been seen entering the wood with Loki. Loki was brought before them, and as they threatened him with torture he promised to bring back Iduna. He borrowed Freya’s hawk-skin and flew off to Giantland. Thiazzi was not at home, but fishing out at sea. Iduna was alone in the house, so that it was easy for Loki to

change her into the convenient shape of a nut and carry her off. When the Giant returned he saw that Iduna was gone, and put on his eagle-skin to pursue. The Gods were looking out, and they saw the eagle flying after Loki and gaining upon him. They feared lest they should lose Iduna again, perhaps for ever, and they made a plan quickly to keep out the eagle. They piled up chips of wood outside Asgard, and stood ready beside them with torches. At the moment when Loki fluttered down within the wall they lit the fire. The flames mounted up as if they were glad to attack the foe of Iduna and youth. They burnt his wings. He tried to turn, but in vain; and had to come to the ground inside the wall of Asgard. There the Gods set upon him and slew him gladly. They welcomed back Iduna yet more gladly.

'When Thiazzi's daughter, Skadi, got news of her father's death, she set out to Asgard to avenge it. She had eaten of Iduna's apples and she was bold and strong. But the Gods met her with signs of peace, saying that they were willing to pay for the death of Thiazzi. Skadi made her own terms. She said that she must have a husband from Asgard and be made to laugh. The Gods accepted these terms, but asked that when Skadi was choosing her husband she should only see the feet of the Gods. She was quite willing, and when the Gods were all ranged before her, hidden from the feet upwards, she chose the feet which she believed to be Balder's. But they were Niord's, and Niord became her husband. It was no easy thing to make her laugh. Many tricks were tried, but in vain. Then Loki undertook to do it. He worked hard and long, and never had he been more clever; he was not still a moment, and was continually inventing some ridiculous position or expression; the sweat poured off him for the first time

in his life : but Thiazzi's daughter did not smile. At last Loki gave up with a face as sad as Skadi's, and full of shame at the antics which seemed absurd when they had no effect. But this sad hang-dog look of her enemy, the treacherous Loki, so delighted her that she burst out laughing, and as this made Loki look more foolish than ever she continued to laugh. How she lived after her marriage with Niord you already know.'

'But if Iduna's apples keep the Gods always young, will they live for ever?' asked Gangler.

'Until Ragnarok,' said Har, with a sad voice.

'Tell me about Ragnarok,' said Gangler.

'First,' said Har, 'the Fimbul-winter will come, and men will think it is an ordinary winter. But it will go on and on, and men will forget about summer except when they read the books of the poets. The sun will not be seen or felt. The snow shall drive from all the four quarters with great winds. The frost shall be heavy, and it shall last for the length of three winters. There shall be wars all over the world, and men shall fight with their fathers and their brothers.

'Then the wolf shall swallow the sun, and his brother shall swallow the moon. The stars shall disappear from the sky. The earth shall quake, and the rocks be loosened and the trees fall. The Dwarfs shall swarm out of their caves and know not what to do. Goldcomb, the cock, shall crow again and again to rouse the Gods. Down in Hell the cock Sooty-red shall crow to the hosts of Hell. The Midgard serpent shall lash with his tail and make the sea brim over on to the land. On these waters the ship Naglfar will float with the Giant Rim to steer it. Garm, the hell-hound, shall bay fiercely before the cavern: Fenrir, the wolf-son of Loki, shall break loose from the rocks, and rage over the earth with his mouth

gaping, the upper jaw touching heaven, the lower jaw on the earth, and fire blazing from his eyes and nostrils. The Midgard serpent shall join him and crawl over the earth, spouting poison.

' Heaven shall crack with a burning greater than any sunset, and through the opening the sons of Muspell shall come riding. Surtur leads them with a sword brighter than the sun.

' Old Heimdall shall sound his long horn. But nevertheless they shall cross the bridge Bifrost. Surtur and the sons of Muspell shall prance on it. Loki shall break loose and join them, with Fenrir and the Midgard serpent, his sons, and the Giant Rim. Bifrost shall break in pieces, but the host shall be safe, and march to the battle-field called Vigrid. There they shall range themselves, the shining sons of Muspell standing apart in their brightness.

' Far off the Gods shall hear old Heimdall blowing his horn, and Garm the hell-hound barking alone on his chain. Then one of them shall remember what it means and say the word "Ragnarok". They shall gather together. Odin shall ride down again to Mimir at the brook-side, and ask for his advice. Yggdrasil shall tremble like a young tree. Odin with his golden helmet shall lead out the Gods and the warriors from the five hundred and forty doors of Valhalla. They shall march to the battle-field. Odin shall fight with Fenrir. Thor shall be next to him, but shall be powerless to help him because he has to fight again with the Midgard serpent. Frey without his sword shall have Surtur against him, and he shall die. The dog Garm shall break his chain and join in the battle. He and Tyr shall wrestle and both shall fall, never to rise again. Thor gives the Midgard serpent its death-blow, but he cannot get away

fast enough from its dying poison, and he is choked to death. Fenrir swallows Odin, but Vidar rushes up and sets his foot on the lower jaw of the wolf and catches the upper jaw in both his hands, slaying the slayer. Heimdall shall throw away his trumpet and join the battle. Loki shall be his adversary, and both shall perish of their wounds.

'Now the mob from Hell shall sweep darkening over the earth. But Surtur shall flood the earth with a sea and a tempest of fire, and shall burn it and all that is upon it. There shall be nothing but smoke and fire.'

'Yet,' said Gangler, 'what will happen then when the whole world is burnt, and all the Gods dead, and all the host of Valhalla and all mankind, for you have already said that every man shall live in one place or another through all the ages?'

Then said Thríði :

'There shall be many good abodes and many evil. The best that shall then be is Gimli, which is in heaven. There will be plenty of good drink for lovers of it in the hall named Brimir. Another good hall is Sindri, which is built of red gold on the hills of the moon. These halls are for people who live rightly.

'But in Nastrond there is a foul great hall with doors opening northward. Its walls are a wickerwork of serpents, and all the heads of the serpents are turned inwards and keep spirting venom into the house. This venom runs down in rivers where murderers and liars have to stand.

'It is worse in Vergelmir, where the snake Nidhogg feeds on the living bodies of the worst of sinners.'

'Will there be any Gods alive?' asked Gangler.

And Har replied :

'Earth shall rise up out of the sea, beautiful and green, and bear a harvest without sowing. Vidar and Vali, as

thou knowest, will be alive, and they shall dwell in Ida-field where Asgard used to be. Modi and Magni, the sons of Thor, shall come there, bringing Mjolnir, the hammer. Balder and Hod also shall leave Hell and live in Ida-field. They will talk together more than once about what they have seen and done and suffered in former times, and about Fenrir and the Midgard serpent. And in the grass they shall find the golden tablets of the Gods.

'In the wood of Hodmimir a woman named Lif, and a man named Lifthrasir, shall remain alive, feeding on the dew of morning. Their children shall cover the earth.

'Before she is devoured the sun shall have a daughter lovelier than herself, who shall shine in her course over the sky as the sun does now.

'But if you wish to ask more questions,' said Har, 'I know not where you will find any one to answer you, for I have never heard any one go beyond this point in the history of the world. May you profit by what you have heard.'

Gangler was about to ask, 'And who, then, are ye? are ye Odin and Thor and Frey or some other Gods?' He wanted also to ask where Iduna was. But before he could speak he heard a crash, so that he thought Ragnarok had come, and he was afraid. At first he could see nothing. He looked in vain for Har, Jafnhar, and Thridi. There was not even a hall. He took a few steps and saw no warriors at feast or play or fight, and no man tossing up seven swords and catching them. He saw instead the dead grass of the hill-side very pale in the frosty early evening, and his horse standing by. Then he set out upon his way, and came home and told all that he could remember of what he had heard from those three kings, or gods.

THE VOLSUNGS

I

THE STORY OF SIGMUND

VOLSUNG was a king of the Huns, like his father and grandfather before him. But his grandfather, Sigi, was an outlaw before he was a king. He had gone out hunting with one of his neighbour's thralls, named Bredi; and because the man killed the most deer, Sigi slew him and buried him in a snow-drift. The tale Sigi told was that Bredi had left him and never returned. But the body was found, and Sigi was made an outlaw for his crime. So he left his native country with a band of his father's men.

As an outlaw Sigi had good luck. He and his men took to the trade of fighting for one king or another who was at war, and at last he grew more powerful than any of the kings and had more land. He became King of the Huns, and his queen bore him a son fit to be king after him. When he was a very old man his enemies, and chiefly his wife's brothers, set upon him, slaying him and many of his party. Rerir, his son, escaped almost alone. He recovered the kingdom; he slew his father's murderers; he became a great king and ruled long and gloriously. His sorrow was that he had no children. Not until a little before his death did he know that his queen was at last to bear a child. They had prayed hard to the Gods for a son, but in vain. At last Odin heard the prayer, and Freya came to the

queen and gave her an apple which she bade her take to the king. She flew to him in the likeness of a crow, and let the apple fall in his lap. He took it home to share it with his queen, and soon after this they knew that their prayer was going to be answered. Rerir died before he could behold his son. The queen also had to die before her child could be born ; for so huge was he that either he or his mother must die, and by her own choice she died. They called the boy Volsung.

Volsung grew fast in strength and stature, being always much bigger than other men, as he was born bigger than they. He ruled Hunland like his father. He was victorious. He built a royal hall which had a tall oak-tree standing alive in the midst of it, covering the roof with its leaves ; and the trunk was called Branstock. For his wife he took a Giant's daughter, who bore him ten sons. Of these ten the eldest and mightiest was Signund ; he and Signy, his twin sister, were the best of Volsung's children, and Sigmund became the father of a race of heroes.

Signy was sought as a wife by King Siggeir of Gothland, who came himself to the oak-tree hall to ask for her. She looked at him and did not like him ; she felt a strong wish not to live with Siggeir and be in his power in a strange land. Nevertheless, she said that she would obey her father, and as he liked Siggeir a marriage was arranged.

Volsung prepared a feast worthy of rich kings and strong warriors in his oak-tree hall ; Signy was wedded to Siggeir ; and all sat down to eat and to drink and to talk and to laugh and to sing and to quarrel. While they were gathered round the fires in the evening a tall, one-eyed man, ancient but mighty, neither a Hun nor a Goth, and bigger than any one in Hunland or Goth-

land, entered the hall unexpected. He was barefooted, with tight linen breeches, a spotted cloak, and a slouched hat. Carrying a sword, he walked up to the Branstock, which he struck with the sword so that it entered into the wood right up to the hilt.

'Whoever shall draw this sword out of the oak,' he said, in a voice worthy of his age and stature, 'shall have it as my gift, and, whoever the man is, he never had a better sword.'

With that the tall man went out of the hall, and was seen no more either by the feasters or by those on the roads.

Kings, nobles, and warriors tried in turn to pull out the sword. None of them could move it. Lastly Sigmund tried, and he drew it as if it had been in a scabbard. Every one saw that it was a good sword, and Siggeir offered thrice its weight in gold for it. But Sigmund said :

'The gold is thine, Siggeir, by right : so also is the sword mine, and I will hold it.'

Siggeir thought that he spoke in scorn ; he held his tongue, and began to think how he might pay Sigmund back for his scorn. Next morning he told King Volsung that he would go back to Gothland that day, giving as his excuse that the weather was fair and the sea smooth, and that if they let this fine day go by they might lose a score of days after it by storm. As it was plain that Siggeir did not wish to remain at the feast, Volsung and his sons did not argue with him. They would not listen to Signy's words :

'I wish I had not to go away with Siggeir. I know that some great misfortune will befall us, and not me only, if I go with him.'

'Daughter,' said Volsung, 'Siggeir has done nothing

that can be blamed. If we take back thy promise to him he will reward us with evil.'

So Signy left home with a hard face, after Siggeir had invited Volsung and his sons to Gothland for a return visit.

In three months' time Volsung and his sons landed on the Gothic shore out of their three ships. Signy was waiting for them in the darkness. Those three months had made her not merely a queen but a fierce-hearted woman, crafty and bold. She came to tell her father that Siggeir was treacherous; he was getting ready for them not feasts but battles; his army was too big for them to resist. Her advice was that they should slip back to gather a strong enough host. Volsung would not. 'In those six years before I was born,' he said, 'I vowed that I would never fly from steel or fire. I am old and have not broken the vow, nor will I in the little time between this and the day when I must die. I must die, yet I can die but once. Until the last day I shall choose to live as a man ought to do, lest afterwards I should have no choice.'

Signy wept, for she had not shed a tear since she left home, but Volsung only said:

'Go back to thy husband and stay with him, whatever happens to us.'

Volsung and his sons and their men were stirring early in the morning, ready for Siggeir. Siggeir was ready for them; his army fell upon them in the first light of day. No man could resist Volsung and his ten sons. Like reapers they cut their way through Siggeir's army and back again, eight times. But Volsung was an old man, and he fell; and as a broad field of corn tires the strongest reapers in the end, so that huge army tired the sons of Volsung. All were taken prisoners.

When Signy knew that her brothers were to die she went to King Siggeir. 'Do not kill my brothers at once,' she said, 'spare them a little longer, if it be only in the stocks, that I may see them and they me.'

'Thou must be mad,' he said, 'to make their death worse by putting it off. But have thy way. I care not how much thou addest to their sufferings, and die they shall at the end and not live.'

The way Siggeir kept his promise was to have the ten brothers taken far out into a wood, there to be laid in a row with their legs covered by a huge beam, so that they could not escape. There they lay all day. At night a great she-wolf out of the forest killed one of the brothers and devoured him. Signy was kept a prisoner by the king, and could not go to her brothers. But she sent a messenger to bring tidings of them, and he told her that the she-wolf had eaten one. Day after day he brought no other tidings than this: that in the night the she-wolf had eaten one of her brothers. At length only Sigmund was left alive. When Signy heard it she sent the messenger swiftly back again with some honey, which he was to smear over Sigmund's face. In the night came the wolf, intending to kill and eat Sigmund. He lay perfectly still. First, the wolf licked the honey clean off his face. When there was no more to be had, she thrust her tongue into his mouth to seek for more. If she found any honey she could not swallow it; for Sigmund took firm hold of her tongue with his teeth. She pulled with all her might without loosening his grip, and thus at last, by working his legs about, Sigmund contrived that she set him free from the beam. But he did not let go of her tongue; it was the wolf that let go of it and soon afterwards died.

When Signy heard of Sigmund's escape, and Siggeir

supposed that he also had been eaten by the wolf, she went out into the woods to see her brother where he was living wild and alone. By her advice he made a house underground in the wood, to dwell in until they could plan some certain revenge. From time to time Signy sent him whatever he had need of.

Thusten years passed. Signy and Siggeir had two sons, and the first-born was ten years old. Now Signy sent this elder boy to Sigmund for a help and a companion. Sigmund gave him a good welcome at evening in his dark house. The first work that he gave the boy was to get ready the bread for baking while he himself fetched wood for the fire. The boy found something in the meal-bag besides meal, something alive, which frightened him though he did not see what it was, and he did nothing but tie up the neck of the bag as tightly as possible. Sigmund came home and found nothing done. 'There was something wriggling in the bag,' said the boy, 'but I kept it safe for you.' By this Sigmund knew that he was more Siggeir's child than Signy's. His mother had no pity on him. 'Kill him,' she said, on hearing the tale. 'What use is he?' And Sigmund killed the boy.

A year later the younger boy came to Sigmund. He also was a coward, and he was killed like his brother, by the advice of Signy.

Sigmund dwelt alone in his house under the ground, living on memories of the oak-tree hall and on hopes of revenge, and keeping bright the sword that fed both his memories and his hopes.

After that Signy bore another son, bigger and stronger than his brothers had been. His name was Sinfiotli, and his mother taught him to hate King Siggeir and to love her brother, Sigmund. All his boasting was of his hero

forefathers; all his ambition was to be like them. When his mother stitched gloves on to his hands in such a way that the skin came off with the gloves, he only said: 'That would have been nothing to Volsung, my grandfather.'

In due time Sinfiotli went to Sigmund's house in the woods. He, too, was left to make the bread. He kneaded up the meal with both hands, never troubling about what was mixed up with it except to make sure by his lusty kneading that it was less alive at last than at first. Sigmund came home with the firewood as he was finishing. 'Was the meal right?' he asked. 'Yes,' said the boy; 'but there was something alive in it when I began. I thought that was perhaps your woodland way.'

Sigmund laughed: 'Thou art a good boy, Sinfiotli, but I will keep this bread for myself. What thou kneaded up in it was a deadly snake. At least, it would be deadly to thee, though not to me.' At this the boy cried because his stomach would not stand poison like Sigmund's.

Now that he had a good companion Sigmund lived less in his earth house. He and Sinfiotli ranged together in the woods, setting upon small bands of travellers and killing them for the sake of their gold and weapons. For a time they took the form of wolves, the fiercest wolves ever known in the forest. Sinfiotli was as fearless as Sigmund and had less pity, which made Sigmund think that the boy had the bravery of Volsung but the fell nature of Siggeir. The boy did not learn from Sigmund to love King Siggeir. Often he talked of avenging the death of Volsung and Volsung's nine sons, and the captivity of his own mother, Signy; he spoke of the day when they would be the death of King Siggeir.

This life trained Sinfiotli for the great revenge. He grew to be the equal of Sigmund in strength and cunning, though each was so powerful that when either one did a deed by himself no one who saw it would believe that the other could do as much. Their plan was to lie in wait for King Siggeir among some tuns of ale standing in the porch of the hall. They got there unseen of any one save Signy. As they were crouching in the dark a golden ball rolled up to their feet, and after it came running the two little princes who were playing with it. The two men were motionless, and at first the children were delighted to see the swords and the mail-coats. Then one of them caught sight of Sinfiotli's eyes and teeth; he could not take his eyes off the fierce face; he stood perfectly still and stared. But the other child, seeing the look of horror on his brother's face, ran up the hall to his father. Signy guessed what had happened. Before Siggeir could understand the boy's story, she rose and went swiftly out to the porch. 'The child has betrayed ye,' she whispered as she was passing, 'kill him and be ready.' Sigmund would not hurt the child, but Sinfiotli slew him and cast the body out of his way.

In another moment a cry was raised. Siggeir was bidding his men to arm and search the porch. They swarmed out, but the two men cut down all who approached them. Others now attacked from the outside, rushing on them in such numbers that swords had no room to swing. In this crush Sigmund and Sinfiotli were no better than sheep, and like sheep they were taken and bound. They were doomed to be buried alive.

A burial-place was made ready for them in the morning. It was a plot of land surrounded by a ring of turf and stones, and divided into two parts by one huge stone

standing on its edge like a wall. In one half they put Sinfiotli; and in the other, Sigmund. Then men began to cover up the tomb with big stones and turf. In this way the two would have been starved to death in their separate graves. But Signy had persuaded a man to throw in with the turf an armful of straw in which she had hidden a piece of swine's flesh and Sigmund's sword sticking in it. This straw fell into Sinfiotli's half. When all was still and the burial-mound complete, and ready to be grown over with grass and last a thousand years, Sinfiotli told Sigmund the news. They were lighter-hearted. Sinfiotli thrust the sword through the stone; Sigmund caught the point and drew it towards him. Sigmund pushing and Sinfiotli pulling, and then Sinfiotli pushing and Sigmund pulling, they used the sword like a two-handed saw until they had sawed through the stone. They heaved over one half of the stone, and then Sinfiotli went through to Sigmund. They now took it in turns to work at one part of their grave until they had cut a way right through and let themselves out.

With the sword sharpened they walked swiftly to Siggeir's hall. Every one slept there, weary with fighting, except the few that had not yet died of their wounds. These wounded men cried out to warn King Siggeir that Sigmund and Sinfiotli were back again, but the king and the others were too well used to the cries of the wounded to be awakened by them. The two were piling up dry wood in the hall, taking no more notice of the wounded men than their sleeping companions did. Having failed to waken the others, the wounded were saving themselves by crawling out. When the pile was tall enough Sigmund set fire to it. The flames leapt up to the roof in their first glad-

ness, kindling the thatch before settling down to burn steadily in the heart of the pile. The kindly warmth pleased the sleepers until the smoke began to stifle them. Then there was a shouting and a running to and fro, and the wounded men crawled away more swiftly out in the dark. In the hall some ran on to the swords of Sigmund and Sinfiotli in trying to escape the flames; some ran away from the swords into the flames; others died from the fall of the flaming roof. Siggeir had only been awakened by Sigmund calling out to Signy to come out and save herself. The king was in a greater hurry than his queen, yet he was slow to face his enemies' flames or weapons. At his side, Signy's face was as fierce as fire or sword. 'This is my work, King Siggeir,' she said. 'Now thou art paid for the honour thou didst me when thou madest me queen of the Goths. Volsung also is partly paid for thy treachery when thou didst slay him and my brothers, thine invited guests. I also am partly paid for these years with thee, for I think that thou wilt die before me, and after that there is no pleasure left that I desire except death.' With these words she walked through the fire to kiss her brother and her son and back again to Siggeir's side, where she died a little after him.

Sigmund gladly sailed with Sinfiotli from Gothland to his own country. They drove out the usurper from Volsung's place; they made the kingdom stronger than ever; and Sigmund took a wife, named Borghild. Two sons, Helgi and Hamond, were born to Sigmund. At the birth of the elder the Norns came to the cradle to prophesy. Helgi was to be a most famous king, they said; and at the age of fifteen he was fit for the wars like any other man; he was wise also and well beloved.

Sinfliotli cared less for fighting with the king's armies than for rapid forays with his chosen men, to plunder and fight. In one of these he caught sight of Swintha, Queen of the Varns, and loved her. But he had to fight another lover before he could win her. Sinfliotli was the victor and he won Queen Swintha. The dead man, as it fell out, was Borghild's brother. When Sinfliotli returned home he told Sigmund this news, and Sigmund told it to the queen. Borghild was very angry, and wished Sigmund to send Sinfliotli out of the land; but he would not. The queen, therefore, pretended to be satisfied with a large fine in gold for her brother's life. At the funeral feast she smiled more on Sinfliotli than any one. Most of all she smiled in offering him a horn of mead, saying, 'Drink, Sinfliotli.'

Sinfliotli looked into the horn and said :

'O Queen, the mere sight of this drink quenches my thirst, so good is it.'

He held it out for Borghild to take back, but Sigmund took it instead and drank it, for he could drink anything. This angered the queen. 'Why,' said she to Sinfliotli, 'why do other men drink thine ale for thee?'

'I think,' was his answer, 'that only Sigmund could drink such ale, and I am sure that none but he would willingly do so.'

Yet Borghild offered him another horn, saying, 'Drink this, Sinfliotli.'

Again Sigmund drained the horn instead of Sinfliotli.

The third time the queen said to Sinfliotli, laughing :

'Drink this, if thou art a Volsung.'

He took the horn, but he said right out :

'This drink is poison, O Queen.'

Then Sigmund spoke. He was drunk, and he knew not what would come of his words :

'Drink, Sinfiotli, and strain out the poison with thy lips.'

But this could not be done, and when Sinfiotli had drained the horn he fell dead.

Sigmund looked at Borghild, yet finished the horn he was drinking. After that he did not look at her again. He bent down and picked up Sinfiotli and carried him out of the hall, bidding men not to follow. He traversed a dark wood, and at the far end of it came to a long firth of sea. By the shore lay a small boat; by the boat stood a barefooted tall man in a cloak, old but mighty. 'Shall I take him over?' said the tall old man. 'Yes,' said Sigmund, and he waded into the water and laid the body of Sinfiotli in the boat. Sigmund would have entered also, but there was no room except for the ferryman. He turned round then to see if the ferryman was coming, but he had vanished. Coming ashore, he looked far up the firth and far out to the sea in vain. When he stepped again towards the boat he saw that it was gone.

So Sigmund returned home. He drove out Queen Borghild, and for some time he lived alone. Then he felt a wish to take Hiordis, daughter of King Eylimi, for a wife. She was beautiful and wise, and her father was a great king. Sigmund made a journey to see King Eylimi. At the same time another king, Lyngi, the son of King Hunding, journeyed there on the same errand. King Eylimi was much perplexed, and therefore he left his daughter Hiordis to choose for herself between the two kings. Her choice fell upon Sigmund. He stayed for the wedding, but Lyngi did not. On his way home again with his bride he was set upon by Lyngi and a very great host. Sigmund was irresistible as of old, and many a sad man ended his troubles, and many

a joyous one his joy, at the point of Sigmund's sword. Where Sigmund was not, there his men failed before the men of King Lyngi. The enemy fled from Sigmund, but they overwhelmed his men. At last one was found to stand up to Sigmund, a tall, one-eyed old man in a blue cloak, wearing a slouched hat. He came steadily towards Sigmund with a spear in his hand. Fiercely Sigmund struck at him, but the sword hit only the spear and broke in two ; and the old man vanished. Sigmund had no more good fortune. He fought only because he knew not how to run away or what good could come of it. At last he fell deeply wounded, with a multitude of his men and King Eylimi, father of Hliordis. Hliordis herself was hiding in the woods, and King Lyngi could not find her. After dark she stole out and came upon Sigmund still alive on the battle-field. She would have healed his wounds, but he refused, because the sword which he had taken from the Branstock was broken and he knew that Odin had given the sign for his death. She begged him to stay to avenge her father's death. ' Another will do that,' said he ; ' thou wilt bear a child, and it will be a man child. Look well after him, for he will be worthy of it. Keep the halves of my sword, and in time he will use it. His name will endure for ever. Now let me die.' And Hliordis sat by him until he was dead, and when she had buried him she went away, carrying the pieces of Sigmund's sword.

II

THE STORY OF HELGI

ONE son of Sigmund was alive when the king met his death. That was Helgi, Borghild's child, who had yet to fulfil the prophecy of the Norns. They had come at his birth to forecast his life. In the silence of the moonlight they twisted the strands of fate for him far and wide over the earth. One of them, Neri's sister, fastening a strand in the North, prayed that it might hold for ever. All said that he would be called the best of princes and the most famous of warrior kings. One said that he would be unfortunate.

At the edge of the wood near the king's hall two ravens sat high on an oak as the day was beginning to break. They were so starved that they could hardly fly, though their bodies had become no heavier than doves, and they sat and talked of nothing but the new Volsung's birth. For it gave them hope of feasting before many years.

'I know something,' said one. 'A son was born to Sigmund this night. His armour is gleaming and his eyes are glittering this moment in the light of dawn. He is a friend of wolves and of ravens. Let us be of good cheer.'

'Let us be patient,' said the other.

The beauty and shapeliness of the child pleased everyone, the men as much as the women, and they said:

'Now shall good seasons come among men.'

Sigmund hastened from the battle-field home, bringing a leek for his beautiful child for a sign of kingship. He

gave him the name of Helgi. He made him gifts at once of halls and lands called Ringstead, Sunfell, Snowfell, Sigarsfell, Ringhaven, Hightown, and Heavning. He gave him a sword with a handle inwrought by the best workmen.

When Sigmund married Hiordis, Helgi was living with Hagal, his foster-father. After the fatal battle with Lyngi, where Sigmund died, Hagal saved Helgi, and cunningly sent him to live in the hall of King Hunding, Lyngi's father. There he stayed unsuspected until his size might have betrayed him as Sigmund's son. Then he slipped away again to Hagal. From Hagal's house he sent a message to Hunding, telling him that it was not Hagal's own son that he had been protecting, as he thought, but a wolf-cub, Sigmund's son, who knew that Hunding had been his father's enemy and would not forget it. Hunding sent men to look for Helgi. The lad was disguised as a bondmaid grinding corn. His fierce eyes betrayed him to one of the searchers, who said to himself :

'Hagal's bondmaid has fierce eyes, no slave-born maid is she who is grinding the corn. No maid either, but a youth, and a king's son, methinks. The grip of a sword would fit those hands better than a mill-handle. . . .'

The rattling of the mill under those strong hands scared the man, and he exclaimed : ' No, no ! my girl, I said nothing.' Helgi said to him, smiling :

' It is no wonder the mill rattles as I turn it. I am one of the cloud-riders. I am a sister of Sigar and Hogni, and before Helgi captured me I fought as warriors do, although a maiden. That is why my eyes are a little wild.'

The fellow was glad to go, and to get out of reach of those eyes and those hands. He did not long save his

life. Helgi and his step-father gathered Sigmund's friends together and set upon Hunding. They routed his army, and Helgi himself slew the king. Hunding's sons asked Helgi for gold to atone for their father's death. He refused them even so much as a ring. He answered them with spears in the battle of Lowefell. Most of them he slew, and scattered the others before he sat down at the foot of the Eagle-rock to rest. The sun was now burning through the dark clouds of the afternoon, and Helgi watched the white fire. He watched until he saw coming out of it, or from the clouds beyond, a troop of what seemed to be women, but riding high in the field of heaven. They were armed like warriors with glittering spears, and their helmets and coats of mail were blood-stained. They were Valkyries, as Helgi knew before they descended one by one to the earth in front of him, shining and beautiful and wild. All he could say to them was :

‘ Valkyries, will ye feast with me to-night ? ’

But they plucked their bowstrings, and the leader of them answered him straight from the saddle :

‘ It is not to drink ale under a roof with you, Helgi, that we have ridden from yonder. No. This is what is the matter. My father Hogni has promised me as a bride for King Hodbrord, Granmar's grim son. I care no more for Hodbrord than a cat ; but it was no good for me to say so. In a few days he will come to fetch me away, unless thou wilt challenge him to battle and deliver me out of his hand.’

With these words she leapt from her horse and kissed Helgi upon the mouth, for she had loved him before ever he had seen her.

‘ If I live, maiden,’ said Helgi, ‘ there shall be a rattle of blades before Hodbrord carries thee away.’

Then the maiden, whose name was Sigrun, smiled on him and galloped away with the others upon the wild wind over the sea.

Helgi roused himself from his seat beneath the Eagle-rock. He sent messengers to go swiftly by land and sea to gather an army, promising the warriors and their sons more gold than ever they had before. Helgi went to Brandey harbour to wait for the ships and the land hosts. It was a great army when all were together. They went aboard and hoisted the sails at dawn. The plashing of oars mingled with the clanging of the Vikings' shields at the sides of the ships; but the noise of the sea drowned the other noises. Hardly could the ships have lived among these ever-changing hills of water had not Sigrun ridden upon the winds above them, to give them more courage and more cunning than ever before. With her help they got safely to Hodbrord's land, and the enemy, catching sight of them, wondered who was the king with the golden standard flying at the bows of his ship. They knew at least that the fleet came for battle. For they saw no shield of peace, but a dreadful halo of war about the Vikings.

One of Helgi's men rose up and taunted one of Hodbrord's men who was watching them land :

' When you are feeding the pigs this evening, my man, do not forget to tell people that the Wolfings are here in a fighting mood. Tell Hodbrord that here he will find Helgi the king, one who has been a careful feeder of eagles and ravens while you have been flirting with slave-girls at the corn-mills.'

' Take care,' said Hodbrord's man, ' take care you are not feeding ravens with your own carcass before I feed the pigs.'

' It will not be you that gives me to the ravens. You
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look fit for skipping about after goats on the rocks, with a hazel stick for a sword.'

'Who was your king's father? 'One that was once a wolf and ate wolf's meat and lived in wolves' houses and heard the wolves' songs.'

'As for you, you were a witch-hag, and you have had a bit in your mouth and a bridle, and what is more, I have ridden you up hill and down dale myself, you . . .'

But Helgi interrupted the wrangling.

'It would be better,' said he impatiently, 'to fight and gladden the eagle than to waste good words. They are my enemies, but they are brave men, and it does us no credit to make them out fools or cowards.'

Two of Hodbrord's men now rode away. Their horses, Sweepwood and Swaywood, ran with all speed through many dark glens and misty hollows to Sunham, where Hodbrord met them at the gate of his court. 'Why are ye flushed with anger?' he asked them.

'The Wolfings,' they answered, 'are landing. We saw their dark sea-stags touch our shore. Fifteen battalions are landing, and there are seven thousand more farther down the coast. Helgi will not wait.'

Hodbrord said only :

'Bridle the fleetest horses! Mount and ride through Mirkwood and over Sparin's Heath and gather a great army! Let no man keep away who can wield a sword! Call Hogni and the sons of Ring, Atli, Yngwi, Alf the Old! They are eager for war.'

At the Wolf-rock the two armies met. Men hewed and stabbed and thrust. There was a shouting and a grunting and a groaning, as they rushed to and fro or slowly pushed back their enemies or gave way before them. All men were skilled in this trade, and harder they toiled at it than ever carpenter, shoemaker, or

ploughman. Helgi laboured hard like one who did not like the way men were made and was striving to shape them different. Yet when he had shaped one by cutting off a head or shortening his legs he went on to another and forgot about the first. He slew all who came against him. In the air the Valkyries swept to and fro watching the fight. Sometimes Sigrun called to him: 'Helgi! Helgi!' and his strength doubled. And when Hogni lay dead, and there was no more enemy, she hailed him as victor, king, and her own lord. Nor did she spare to visit Hodbrord where he lay dying, and to say:

'Sigrun from Sevafell shall never rest, O King Hodbrord, in thy arms. Thy life is over, and the whole race of Granmar is at an end.'

Then she rode again to Helgi, and alighted at his side and kissed him.

'Sigrun,' he said to her, 'thou hast been as a war-goddess to me to-day. And yet, fairy, thou canst not have everything as thou wouldst wish. Much thou hast done. Something has Fate done also; for, alas! I have been the slayer of many men of thy kin, thy father, Hogni, and thy brothers all but one. One of those that died was the fiercest enemy that ever I had, for he fought after his head was off. This was none of thy work, and would that it had not been mine!'

Said Sigrun:

'Truly should I be glad if some of those who are dead were alive, yet gladly will I now shelter me in thine arms, O Helgi.'

So Helgi married Sigrun, and they lived together happily. Helgi was still victorious over men and Giants. Nor did Sigrun forget how to ride in the air and aid his conquests. When he sailed over the sea against Hati the Giant she guarded the fleet from the sorcery of

Rimegerd, the Giant's daughter. He slew the Giant, and having got his army safely on board ship again the fleet lay moored for the night under the cliffs. Only Atli, the warder of Helgi, was awake, keeping watch on deck, when Rimegerd appeared above on the cliffs and called to him :

'Who is the lord of this fleet? You come boastfully, as if you were safe. Tell me the name of your king !'

'Our king,' said Atli, 'is our king, if you want to know. But *you* can do him no harm. Ogresses cannot hurt him.'

'And who are you?'

'My name is Atli. Some call me Ate, and perhaps I shall prove hateful to you if you try any of your ogress tricks. Many a night-rider have I slain when I have been in the wave-washed bows of our ship. And who are you?'

'I am Rimegerd, Hati's daughter.'

'I know. You were swimming before Helgi's ships to wreck them, but you had no luck, Rimegerd.'

'No. That was not me, but my mother. It was I that drowned the sons of Lodvar in the deep, if you can remember such little things.'

Rimegerd laughed at him. She was trying hard to lure him from the ship with her talk. But he always found words for an answer. Then she wakened Helgi himself with shouting :

'Get up, Helgi ! and pay me for the slaughter of my poor dear father, Hati. Or if you will come and wed me I will let you off the payment.'

'Ogresses should have ogres, Rimegerd,' said Helgi.

'Oh ! I know your heart, Helgi. You would rather have her that was watching last night over the haven.'

Without Sigrun you would never have landed, and without Sigrun you would not be here to-night.'

'Ogresses know their betters. Tell me, Rimegerd—and if you do I will pay you what Hati was worth—how many of the Valkyries were there in the air? Or was it only one?'

'One rode before the others dressed in white, with a helmet. But there were three times nine altogether. Their steeds shook dew from their manes into the valleys and hail on to the hill-tops as they reared on the wind. I hate them all.'

Rimegerd had stayed too long talking. Never would she leave the edge of the cliff now that the sun was up, and Atli laughed loudly at her in triumph:

'Rimegerd! Rimegerd! look eastward. The ships are safe now from Rimegerd, for it is day. It is day, Rimegerd! and day is not for ogresses. You have talked too long. You are stone now instead of ogre-flesh. Now you will be some good to men. You shall stand as a harbour-mark for sailors, and also you shall make them laugh for many a year. Stone is better than ogre-flesh except for ogres, Rimegerd.'

Thus Helgi came safely back to Sigrun. In their happiness they were forgetting that one son of Hogni, called Day, was still alive. Day had nothing to make him forget Helgi. He prayed to Odin for help in avenging his father's death, and he dwelt in the forest, looking for a chance to strike at his enemy. At last an hour came when Day found Helgi alone in the forest. Day had a spear from Odin with which he could not miss Helgi's heart, and Helgi died. Day himself brought the bad news to Sigrun:

'Sorry am I for thee, my sister, that I have slain him who was the best of earthly princes and dearer to thee

than any among the living or the dead. But I loved him not, any more than he loved our father and our brothers, and as he slew them so I have slain him.'

Sigrun answered him only with cursing :

' May the ship thou art in never sail, even with a fair wind aft ! May the horse thou ridest never run, though thy foemen are following after thy life ! May the sword thou drawest never bite any except thyself ! Would that thou wert an outlaw solitary in the woods with no meat but carrion, miserably envying the dead but afraid to die ! '

' Sister, this is folly to curse a brother. Besides, it was Odin that did the harm. He made the strife between us. Yet I will give thee half of my land to make up for the wrong I have done.'

She took no heed of his words, for she was thinking :

' Never again shall I sit happy at Sevafell, or have joy at morn or evening ; for never again shall I see the sunlight flash on my lord's company, never see his war-horse with the gold bit bearing home my king, never welcome him again. Helgi was as a wolf to his foemen, and they were as goats. There was none like him. He stood among other kings like an ash among thorns or as the leading stag among the deer. See him in Odin's hall ! He calls King Hunding to get ready a bath for his feet and tie up the hounds and bait the horses. " Hunding ! " he says, " give the hogs their swill before thou goest to sleep." Oh Helgi ! Helgi ! '

She was wild with sorrow. Day by day, after they had buried Helgi under a mound fit for such a king, she sat expecting to see him again. One day she had waited until sunset, and she muttered :

' The son of Sigmund would have been here by now if he was coming from Odin's halls. I have but a faint

hope left now when the eagles are settling on the ash-tree for the night, and the household are thronging to the house of dreams.'

And she left her bondmaid alone by the burial-mound. Suddenly she heard the bondmaid shriek out :

'Is that a phantom I am looking at, or is the Doom of the Powers come? Sure, dead men cannot ride and prick their steeds with spurs? . . . Or have ye truly come home at last, as the queen expected? Look, look!'

The leading rider answered :

'Thou seest no phantom, but men riding home and using the spur. Sigrun! Sigrun! Come out of Sevafell. The burial-mound is opened. I am Helgi come out to see thee, and to ask thee to stanch my wounds. They are bleeding still.'

Sigrun ran towards him, past the bondmaid, who tried to stop her :

'Go not alone to the houses of the Ghosts. It is dark now, and the dead fiends grow stronger with the dark.'

Sigrun could not be stopped. She heard Helgi saying :

'Come and stay the bleeding of my wounds. I must be on the other side of the rainbow before cock-crow.'

She fell upon his neck and kissed him, murmuring loudly :

'I am as glad to see thee as famishing hawks to scent their warm prey or to see the dawn break. I will kiss thee now, my dead king, before thou cast off thy gory mail-coat. O Helgi! thy hair is thick with hoar-frost! thy body is drenched with dew! thy hands are cold and dank! what can I do?'

'Sigrun from Sevafell,' he answered, 'through thee am I drenched with this dew. For night after night, O sunbright lady of the South, thou weepest cruel tears

ere thou sleepest, and every tear falls bloody, dank, and cold on my breast.'

She went with him into the grave.

'Let us drink together, Sigrun !' said Helgi, 'let us drink costly draughts, though we have no longer love or land. Let no man chant dirges for me though he see the wounds on my breast ; for now are maidens, royal ladies, become companions for dead men in graves !'

Sigrun let his head gently down as if on a pillow, and smoothed his hair. He lay still and she stretched herself out beside him. 'Never,' said Helgi, 'was there a greater marvel at Sevafell than for thee to join me in the grave, the dead by the living.'

When she awoke at cock-crow she was drenched with dew and her hair was stiff with hoar-frost, but she saw only the bondmaid and felt only the bondmaid's arms about her, carrying her back into the hall. Then as no other night was like that night, and no day ever gave her to Helgi or Helgi to her, she pined away in weariness and died.

III

THE STORY OF SIGURD

I

HELGI's more famous brother, Sigurd, was not yet born when his father, Sigmund, died on the battle-field. Hiordis, the queen, had only the unborn child and the two pieces of Sigmund's sword when she went into the woods with one bondmaid to hide ; for they saw many ships sailing towards the land. In the wood Hiordis changed dresses with the woman, who was to call herself the queen and Hiordis her bondmaid. But the men in the ships had seen them, and having found them and the treasure which they had hidden, led them on board. Alf, son of King Hialprek of Denmark, was the captain, and as he sat at the tiller he questioned the women. For he saw that she who called herself the bondmaid knew well how to behave in the company of noble men, and he tried to get at the bottom of the mystery. But he learned hardly anything. In Denmark Alf's mother, the queen, soon saw that there was a mystery. She wanted to know why the fairer of the two women had fewer rings and poorer raiment than the other. So she sat down by them, and after getting into talk with them asked the one who called herself Hiordis :

‘ How can you tell in your country what time it is in the winter nights, when the stars are hidden ? ’

‘ When I was a young girl,’ she said, ‘ I had to be up at the same hour, summer and winter, about the time

of sunrise in the middle of May ; and even now I always wake at that hour, though, of course, I do not rise so early.'

'Strange for a king's daughter !' laughed the old queen. Then she asked the one who called herself bond-maid the same question, and she answered :

'My father gave me a gold ring that always grows chill on my finger at dawn, and thus I know the time.'

At this the old queen laughed still more.

'There was plenty of gold in that country for a bond-maid to have a ring of it ! But now we have had enough of secrets.'

So they all laughed together and the queen told her son, and he said to Iliordis :

'If thou hadst not hidden this I should have treated thee as I thought thou deservedst ; but I shall not hide anything from thee, and especially one thing, that thou shalt be my wife.'

In a little while Iliordis gave birth to Sigmund's child. Looking at the boy's keen eyes, King Hialprek judged that he would make a man without an equal. He was given the name of Sigurd, and he grew up strong and big and of a generous nature ; and his mother married King Alf.

Sigurd spent his boyhood with a foster-father named Regin, one of the Dwarfs who are clever at working with metals. As soon as he saw the boy Regin said :

'The son of Sigmund, a keen warrior, has come to us. He has more courage than many a man, and the grip of a wolf. I will bring him up, and he shall be the mightiest king under the sun.'

Regin taught him many things, such as writing, languages, and chess, which were thought right for the sons of kings. In everything the boy pleased his foster-

father except that he was too contented. Regin asked him if he knew how much treasure belonged to him and who had charge of it, and when he answered that the kings were keeping it for him, asked if he trusted them completely. 'It is well,' said Sigurd, 'that they should keep it so long as they know better than I how to do so.'

At another time Regin asked why it was that he ran about on foot like any other boy, and not like the son of a king. 'If I like I can have a horse,' he replied; 'they give me whatever I want.' 'Then ask for a horse,' said Regin; and Sigurd asked the king for a horse, and the king bade him choose one for himself and anything else that he might want. Sigurd was going next day to look for a horse when he met a tall old man, a stranger, with a slouched hat and cloak, who asked where he was going, and he told him. The old man advised him to drive the herd of horses down into the river, and he himself would help. The horses entered the river quickly enough, but all went the shortest way to land, except one, who swam right across. That one Sigurd took for his own. It was a grey horse, young, but strong and big and wild. The old man said: 'Take care of him. He is one of Sleipnir's sons, and he will turn out the best horse in this world.' He was given the name of Grani, which is a name no more to be forgotten than Sigurd.

Seeing the strength of the lad, Regin planned to use it for getting a treasure that he knew of. He said: 'Why should you run about like a churl's son when you might be getting wealth and honour with it? I know a treasure of gold which no king ever saw the like of. It lies not very far off on Glistenheath, guarded by the dragon Fafnir, a very famous dragon that men talk much of—

too much, perhaps; but thou, Sigurd, art not his match, though thou dost come of the race of Volsung and art Sigmund's son.'

'I dare say,' said Sigurd, 'I am too young to have all the heart and sense of those heroes, but why shouldest thou call me coward? Thou dost not *think* me one, but callest me the name to make me attempt what is perhaps beyond me.'

'I will tell thee the tale,' Regin answered. 'My father was a great and rich man, and his name was Rodmar. He had two sons before me, Fafnir and Otter. Fafnir was the biggest and grimmest of us: he did little, but he wanted to own everything near him and to keep every one else away from it, while he slept in the midst of his possessions. Otter was the cleverest: he lived chiefly in the water; he did not like the land, yet he brought our father great wealth of salmons. One day he had been fishing under a waterfall, and was falling asleep over the best part of a salmon that he had caught, when three Gods came by, Odin, Loki, and Hœnir. He did not escape Loki's eyes. Picking up a big stone, the God threw it at Otter with all his might, so that he died. They skinned him, and in the evening they came to Rodmar's house. They showed Rodmar the skin. "You have slain my son Otter," said the old man, "and you shall pay for it according to the law of this country, which is that you shall fill the skin full of gold and also cover it altogether with gold." In the pool by the waterfall where Otter had lived, a Dwarf named Andwari lived also in the shape of a pike; for an evil Norn had given him that shape long ago, and condemned him to the water. But he still had with him in the rocks a very great treasure. Loki went to look for this treasure with a net borrowed from Ran, who

was the wife of Eager, the Sea God. He caught Andwari and made him give up the gold that he had concealed in the rocks under water. One ring only did he keep back, yet Loki knew it and sent him back for it. Andwari gave him the ring, adding this curse, which was to go with the ring:

“This treasure shall be the death of two brothers. It shall make feuds among eight kings. Nobody shall have joy of it.”

‘Loki was not long in filling the skin of Otter with gold. Covering it was more difficult. For Rodmar tied the very tip of the tail to a branch so that the heavy body only just weighed the tip of the nose down to the ground, and the Gods had to pile up the gold until not a hair could be seen. To cover the last hairs Loki had to produce the ring that went with the curse. He did not forget the curse. “Here is your gold,” he said, “and far too much of it. But there is no luck with it. It will be the death of you and your sons.”

“You do not like parting with your gold,” retorted Rodmar, “I know very well that you give it without love. If I had known you were coming this way with your mischief you would have died instead of my son.”

“Don’t talk now,” said Loki, “but wait until you know as much as I, though you will never know all, because some of those who will suffer by this curse are not yet born.”

“You can’t frighten me,” said Rodmar; “until I die I shall enjoy the red gold, and I am not afraid of what may happen after. Be off with you!”

‘But Loki was right. Before long Fafnir slew the old man for the sake of the treasure. He would let me have none of it, so I became a smith, and he lies coiled up

all over the gold like the roots of a tree. It is a wondrous treasure.'

'You have been unlucky,' said Sigurd. 'But if I am to kill your brother for you, I must have a sword, a good sword, and then, should I have the strength, you may yet have your treasure. You are the second brother. Have you any brothers left besides Fafnir?'

Regin did not answer. He was in a hurry to make a sword, and he made a bad one, which Sigurd broke at the first trial. He made a second one that was better, but not strong enough for Sigurd. 'Are you a liar and traitor like the rest of your family?' asked Sigurd. Then he remembered the two pieces of his father's sword, Gram, which his mother kept in a safe place. He went to his mother and she gave him the sword, because his face told her that he would be worthy of it. He took it at once to Regin, bidding him make a good sword out of those good pieces. And so he did, and a fire seemed to burn along the two edges of it as it was carried out of the forge. Regin said: 'I cannot make a sword if this is not a good one.' Sigurd said nothing, but grasped it and struck at the anvil with it. The good blade cut clean through the anvil without a hurt. Next Sigurd went down to the river and threw a lock of wool in, and held the sword so that the water carried the wool against the edge of the blade. The wool was cut instantly in two.

'And now,' said Regin, seeing that Sigurd was pleased, 'perhaps you will keep your promise and see about Fafnir?'

'I gave no promise, Regin,' said the lad, 'and what would the sons of Hunding say if they saw me getting gold before avenging my father and my mother's father, whom they slew?'

Before everything else, now that he had the sword, Sigurd set forth with an army over the sea to finish the destruction of Hunding which Helgi began. He himself steered the dragon-ship, that was noblest in all the fleet and had the most glorious coloured pictures on its sails. A storm attacked them with foam on its waves like blood, yet they refused even to shorten sail. As they were passing close under a high sea-cliff, a tall man standing on the edge in slouched hat and cloak, very old but mighty, hailed them through the storm. He asked who was their captain, and they answered, 'Sigurd, son of Sigmund, the most famous of the young men.' 'You say truly,' said the tall man, 'there is none like Sigurd among all the sons of kings. Will ye take me on board?' First they asked his name, and he answered: 'They call me Nikar when I provide the ravens with corpses; but now you may call me Feng.'

Sigurd knew him, but still called him Nikar. When he was on board, Sigurd asked him what were the truest tokens of victory. The old man said that it was good to be followed by a raven before battle, and to hear the wolf howl under the ash-trees and to see it going before you to battle; and he added, 'No man should fight with his face towards the sun when it is low; let the enemy look that way. Take care, too, that the warriors are all sprucely combed, well washed, and well fed, in the morning of battle; for no one knows where his lodging will be at night.' While Nikar was speaking the storm sank asleep; when they touched land in Hunding's country he vanished.

Sigurd's army laid waste the country from the edge of the sea onwards, until they were faced by Lyngi, the king. Then a great battle was fought. Sword and axe carved the flesh of men, spear and arrow pierced it.

Men that in the morning could speak, and think, and love, and run, and do a hundred different things, lay down before nightfall able to do nothing but feed the wolf, the raven, the rat, and the maggot. And all this was the work of sharp steel held in other men's hands. Good and bad, strong and weak, old and young, brave and cowardly, fell in heaps, and a few escaped. But because fewer of Sigurd's men fell than of Lyngi's, and Sigurd himself killed Lyngi, Sigurd had the victory. Those who were alive and unwounded on his side rejoiced; he got both honour and wealth, and was welcomed back with many feasts.

Regin did not forget Fafnir. He reminded Sigurd of the hoard, and Sigurd willingly rode up with him across Glistenheath to the dragon's drinking-place. Every evening the dragon used to go to a cliff above the river, and leaning out over it drank with ease of the water thirty fathoms below. Regin advised Sigurd to dig a hole at this place and wait in it until the dragon passed over the top; then he could stab it from below. Regin turned back before they had gone very far, leaving Sigurd to dig the pit, to wait, and to fight, alone.

While he was digging, a tall, bearded old man asked him what he was working at. When he knew, he advised Sigurd to dig several pits for the blood to run into, as well as one to sit in, lest he should be drowned in the blood. The old man vanished, and Sigurd dug several pits according to his advice. And it was well that he did. For when he had stabbed the dragon, the blood ran as if from a pump; nor could he move out for some time for fear of the coils that were lashing everywhere, more like three dragons than one. At last he slipped out and recovered his sword. The dying dragon asked Sigurd to tell him his name and his family. But dreading

lest Fafnir should curse him by his name, he pretended to have none, until he was called a liar. Then he answered truthfully, 'Sigurd, the son of Sigmund.' Fafnir did not curse him, but told him that he knew who had persuaded him to seek the hoard: 'It was Regin, my brother,' he said, 'that caused my death, and it is my one joy that he will cause thy death also. That gold will be thy bane as it was mine. Better would it be for thee to ride away, for vengeance is sometimes taken in spite of a death-wound.'

'I did not come here,' said Sigurd, 'to ask thy counsel, but to win thy treasure.'

'Go, then, to my lair. There is gold enough for all thy life, and it shall be thy bane and the bane of every one that owns it.'

Sigurd answered:

'If I thought I should never die were I not to touch that treasure, I would leave it behind me. But I must die, and, so long as he lives, a brave and true man can do well with riches.'

Fafnir said no more because he was dead.

Regin welcomed back Sigurd from his victory, and praised the deed. Nevertheless, he wept a little for his brother; also he reminded Sigurd that the sword of victory was of his making. Sigurd laughed, because Regin had been hiding with his face buried in the heather during the fight. When he cut out Fafnir's heart Regin begged him to roast it and give him some of it to eat. Sigurd put the heart to roast before a fire. Regin lay down and slept. Presently, to try whether the heart was well roasted, Sigurd dipped his finger in the juice and tasted it. The dragon's blood had magic in it. For, by that one taste, Sigurd gained the power to understand the speech of all the birds. Some magpies

were talking in the thorn-trees close by, and he heard one say :

‘ There sits the fool Sigurd covered with blood, and roasting the dragon’s heart for somebody else.’

Another said :

‘ There lies Regin, thinking how he may get the treasure for himself.’

A third one said :

‘ Ye are both right. He had better give the ravens another meal.’

The fourth said :

‘ He will be a fool if he lets this other brother go free.’

So Sigurd cut off Regin’s head and the birds knew that he had understood them, and they said to him out of the thorn-trees, as he sat looking at the fire and the roasting heart :

‘ Pick up thy gold, Sigurd. It is not kingly to listen to foreboding. There is a king’s daughter waiting for thee, Brynhild, fairer than all others, and adorned with gold. She is in a golden hall that stands within a wall of flames on Hindfell. There she is sleeping. For Odin has put a spell upon her, because she, one of his Valkyries, destroyed one warrior and saved another against the will of the Gods.’

Sigurd took his eyes off the fire, and ate some of the heart and kept the rest. Then he mounted Grani and rode away to the cave of the treasure. It was cool now where the dragon had lain. Part of the gold was still in Otter’s skin, for it had never been counted since Andwari lost it. Rodmar died before he had gone over all the rings and the coins and the jewels. Fafnir was too busy guarding them to count them, and he found, when he tried, that the high numbers soon sent him to sleep. Sigurd did not stop now to count the precious

things. One ring he put upon his finger because of its brightness—the ring of the curse. He took also a corslet and a helmet of gold to wear. Two chests full of gold he put on Grani's back; until its master was mounted the horse seemed unable to move, but once it felt him in the saddle it galloped out of the cave and away.

II

Sigurd rode until he came in sight of Hindfell and a hedge of fire burning upon it. Inside the hedge of fire, as he came nearer, he saw a castle, and shields on the wall, and a banner on high. Grani galloped through the flames as if they had been waves, and Sigurd was untouched. At the castle gate he alighted, and entered with Gram, his sword. Not a sound could he hear as he went from room to room, except the hum of a bee that had lost its way. Nor did he see any other living thing until he came to a room where some one lay asleep in full armour. After waiting a little for the sleeper to awake, he noticed that a spider had spun a web between the helmet and the corslet, and that the spider lay dead in its web. Yet it was not a dead face that he found on taking off the helmet, but a living woman's. She slept as still and as close-wrapped in her corslet as a bud in winter. With his sword Sigurd slit open the corslet as if it had been cloth, and the woman emerged from it like a poppy-bud opening fast on a summer's day. She stretched herself, smiling with eyes that seemed to see nothing until she had closed them awhile and opened them again, and said:

'Who is this mighty one that has cut me free out of my sleep? Is it Sigurd, the son of Sigmund? Is that Fafnir's helmet on his head and Fafnir's bane, the sword Gram, in his hand?'

Sigurd answered :

' I am Sigurd, Sigmund's son, of the race of Volsung, and I have set thee free.'

She cried :

' I was enchanted by Odin. My sleep has been long, and never could I have broken out of it unhelped.'

' Art thou, then, Brynhild, the Valkyrie ? '

' I am Brynhild,' she said, but before speaking more to Sigurd she stood up to salute the day, and the night, and the Gods, and the earth, because now she could know them once more. Tall and fair she was, and bold as if she had been a sister of Thor. She was the daughter of a hero, fit to be the wife and the mother of heroes, and to be sung by poets. She told Sigurd how two kings were fighting, an old man named Helm Gunnar, and a younger named Agnar; and Odin had promised Gunnar the victory, but she gave it to Agnar, so that he slew his enemy. Odin was angered at this. He surrounded her with shields, red and white, so that their rims touched and she could not escape. He pricked her with the thorn of sleep, and decreed that her sleep should only be broken by one who never felt fear. He planted the high flames round her castle, and decreed that only the man who brought with him Fafnir's gold should be able to ride through them. She was no longer to be a Valkyrie to fight, but a woman to be wedded like any other.

Sigurd asked her to teach him what she had learned as a Valkyrie.

' It may well be,' she said, ' that thou knowest already more than I. Yet what I know I will gladly teach. But first let us drink together, and mayst thou win glory by my teaching and never forget this day.'

When they had drunk together the cup of love, she said :

'Keep thy friends and thy kinsfolk, and overlook their faults and misdeeds.

'Take little notice of what fools say when there is a crowd and every one is talking; for they say more than they mean.

'Nor take much notice either of what a drunken man says, and do not try to get the better of him by words.

'Trust not the friends or kinsfolk of those whom thou hast harmed.

'Go out into the open battle-field to fight thy foes; do not wait to be burnt in thine own house.

'Do no wrong to the dead, and if thou find a dead man bid him sleep sweetly.

'Say what thou meanest, and keep thy word.

'Beware of evil. I cannot forecast long life for thee. Mighty feuds have arisen, and thou wilt be drawn into them.'

Sigurd loved her the more for her wisdom, and said: 'Brynhild, I will have thee for my own.' And she answered: 'I would choose thee out of all the sons of men.' And Sigurd and Brynhild swore to love one another.

Brynhild watched him ride away. He was tall and broad-shouldered in perfect proportion. His eyes were so keen that few dared look at them; his hair was long and golden red; his beard short and thick, and of the same colour. He was the foremost of all heroes in the northern lands, good at battle, at speech, at sports, and at friendship; the best of friends and the worst of enemies. He was young, and he thought he would live for ever and yet never be old. And he was right. For he never grew to be old, and he lives for ever in poets' books. While Brynhild watched him she almost forgot that he was her lover, because he was mightier-looking than

a mortal man, like one of the heroes who lived for ever in the songs of the minstrels. She half believed that he was one of those heroes come back to earth; she half feared that he was only a vision. Certainly she had seen no one like him, as he rode away in his golden armour adorned with images of dragons, and a red dragon on his shield of gold.

He stopped first at the high house of a chief named Heimir, who had married Brynhild's sister, Bekkild, and had been foster-father to Brynhild herself. He stayed there riding and shooting with Heimir's son, Alswid. But one day when they were hawking Sigurd's hawk flew in at a window high in a tower, and he went up to fetch it. He passed many rooms before coming to the one he sought. In some he saw nothing; in one a sheet of blue sky through a window; in another armour; and in one a fair woman bending at needle-work, and so astonished was he that not until he had gone some way past did he know for certain that it was Brynhild he had seen. He turned back to look for the room, but somehow missed it, and came down again to Alswid without his hawk.

'What is the matter?' asked Alswid, and Sigurd told him.

'Yes,' said Alswid, 'that was Brynhild, Budli's daughter, the noblest of noble women. She came here not long after thee. Do not let her trouble thy heart. She will love no man.'

Nevertheless, next day Sigurd found her room, and came to her where she sat working a picture of gold on a cloth, and the picture was of Sigurd and the dragon and the dragon's hoard. He asked her if all was well with her, and she said it was, but said also that no one can tell how long good fortune will last. Sigurd sat down

at her side. Presently four maidens entered, carrying large goblets of wine. Brynhild stood up and offered one to him, bidding him welcome and to drink the wine. First he took the goblet and set it down, and then took her hand and drew her towards him, and put his arms about her neck and kissed her, saying :

‘Thou art fairest !’

‘Ah,’ said Brynhild, ‘is it wise to trust in women ? For they often break their words.’

‘The day that made us both happy together would be the best of days,’ said Sigurd.

‘But I,’ said she, ‘am a war maid, and it is not fated that we shall dwell together.’

‘Then there is nothing in life,’ said he.

‘Yes, but there is,’ said she, ‘for me the battle ; for thee, Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki, for a wife.’

‘No, no !’ he cried, ‘I can never forget thee. No king’s daughter shall steal away my thoughts from thee. I swear now that either I will have thee for my own, or I will have no one.’

Brynhild would say no more. She looked kindly and sorrowfully at Sigurd. She took the gold ring that he gave her so fondly that she seemed to forget what she had been saying. Sigurd did forget everything, except her kind looks and his ring on her finger. No man now was more joyous than he in the chase and at the feast.

Brynhild sat on in her tower sewing at the picture of Sigurd and Fafnir, and Fafnir’s hoard. Few came to see her, and she desired no one that came. But one day a large company of women was seen coming towards the castle in gilded chariots. ‘That will be Gudrun, Giuki’s daughter, fairest of women,’ said Brynhild on hearing the news ; ‘let us go out to meet her.’ So they went out and greeted Gudrun and her company, and led her

into the hall and waited upon her. But Gudrun said hardly anything. Brynhild chided her gently, saying :

‘Let us talk about the greatest kings and heroes, and the deeds they have done.’

‘What kings,’ asked Gudrun suddenly, ‘dost thou think the greatest?’

And Brynhild answered :

‘The sons of Haki.’

‘They are great men in their way, yet Sigar took away one of their sisters and burnt the other with her house, nor have they taken revenge. I think my own brothers are greater than these.’

‘They are men of the greatest promise, but they have so far done little ; and there is one who is far before them—Sigurd, the son of Sigmund, who slew his father’s slayers, and put an end to Fafnir and took away his hoard.’

‘How dost thou know these things ? But I know how it is ; it is through love. Now I will tell thee why I came here ; it was to tell thee a dream that has grieved me.’

‘Be not troubled by dreams, but stay with thy friends and let them see thee happy as they would wish.’

‘Thou art like my woman, who said when I told her that I had had a dream that grieved me, “I shall gladly hear it, because you can often tell the weather from a dream.” This is no weather dream. I dreamed that I had a golden hawk on my wrist, and that I gave up everything for the sake of the hawk. The woman said this meant that some goodly king’s son was waiting for my love. But she could tell me no more, so I said, “Let us go to Brynhild. She is wise, and perhaps she will tell us more.” The next night I dreamed that I and many others went out from the bower, and saw a hart fairer than all others and golden-haired. All of us

desired him, but I had him. Yet I had him for a moment only. Even as he stood at my knees an arrow pierced him and slew him. Thine, Brynhild, thine was the arrow; and in the dream thou gavest me instead of the hart a wolf-cub that sprinkled me with my brothers' blood.'

Brynhild looked kindly enough at Gudrun as she told her the meaning of the dream:

'Sigurd,' she said, 'shall come to thee, and thou shalt have him, though I have chosen him for my own. For thy mother, Grimhild, shall put something in his drink. Quickly shalt thou wed him, and quickly lose him. Afterwards thou shalt wed my brother, King Atli, who shall slay thy brothers. But in the end thou shalt slay Atli.'

'Would that I had never known such things,' wept Gudrun, and turned away.

'Weep, Gudrun,' said Brynhild, 'and weeping will wash away thy knowledge. If thou art afraid of the truth, thou wilt soon forget it with a little weeping and a little laughter.'

But Gudrun did not hear these words. The sight of Sigurd riding into her father's courtyard not long after this would have made her forget greater woes than ever came from a dream. One of the men in the courtyard ran in to King Giuki, shouting:

'There is one of the Gods in our courtyard, though which of them it is I cannot think. For Balder is dead, and this one is better-looking and younger than Odin or Thor. He is all over gold. His horse is a horse indeed. His weapons are wonderful: the sword pricks your finger if you look at it.'

Giuki went out, pretending to be used to such wonders, for he was a great king, and at first he said:

'Who art thou riding in here so free? Have my sons given thee leave?'

'I am called Sigurd,' answered the God-like man.

'Then welcome,' said Giuki at once; 'everything here is at thy service.'

Gudrun was watching from a window, but when Sigurd looked up he saw only a pigeon courting on the roof-top. He made friends at once with Giuki's sons, Gunnar and Hogni. He rode out with them here and there, and in all feats of strength and skill he excelled them. Their mother, Grimhild, soon learned from them that he loved Brynhild, for he often talked of her. Grimhild liked him, and thought that she would like him better still as a son-in-law, because he was so powerful and had such wealth. So she plotted to bring about a marriage between Sigurd and Gudrun. One night at a feast she offered him a horn to drink from with her own hands. He took it as he would have taken any other horn, and as he drank, Grimhild looked steadily at him, saying in a quiet voice several times:

'Thy father shall be Giuki and I shall be thy mother. Thy brothers shall be Gunnar and Hogni.'

When Sigurd heard her saying these words for the last time, as he finished drinking, he said:

'So shall it be. There could be nothing better.' For that drink had taken away from him all memory of Brynhild.

Giuki knew nothing of this, nor did Grimhild tell him. But one day she spoke to him very lovingly for some time, and then gradually turned the talk to Sigurd, saying that Giuki ought to give his daughter to Sigurd and so keep him with them for ever. Giuki had not heard before of kings offering their daughters in this way, but Grimhild persuaded and persuaded him, until he

thought there could be no harm in offering Gudrun to one like Sigurd. Hogni and Gunnar knew of the plan, and they sometimes talked of Gudrun to Sigurd. But Sigurd liked her well enough after the drink and Grimhild's words in the hall. The maid herself had poured out his wine for him on the night after, and he loved her as she bent over the cup, watching the wine for fear of spilling it, yet filling it too full for all her watching. Therefore it easily came about that Sigurd married Gudrun. He and her two brothers swore brotherhood, and they lived together and fought together, and the glory of each one was the glory of all. Gudrun pleased Sigurd well; and he gave her some of Fafnir's heart to eat, which made her bold and wise as well as loving-kind; and they had a son whom they called Sigmund.

III

Grimhild was satisfied for a time. Then she thought of one thing more to make the family power and happiness complete. If only Gunnar could marry Brynhild! Soon every one was speaking of this. Even Sigurd joined in urging Gunnar to woo Brynhild. Moreover, when Gunnar set out for the house of King Budli, Brynhild's father, Sigurd was in his company. Budli was willing for Gunnar to have Brynhild, if Brynhild was willing to have him; for, said he, 'She is proud and has her own way.' Heimir, her foster-father, said the same thing, and that she would not have any one who had not ridden to her through the hedge of flames. They now rode to Brynhild's castle. The hedge still grew high all round it, too high to be leaped and too thick to be pierced by ordinary riders. Gunnar's horse would not look at the flames, though he struck it fiercely.

Sigurd lent him his own horse Grani, but Grani stood still with Gunnar in the saddle. Then Sigurd took on the likeness of Gunnar and gave Gunnar his own, and mounted the horse. Grani knew who was riding him, and ran straight ahead, though the earth shook and the flames towered up above the castle as if they would break loose from the earth and touch the sky. Grani remembered his first ride, but Sigurd forgot. Now for the second time Sigurd went into the castle up to Brynhild's chamber, where she sat with her corslet and helmet on, and her sword in her hand. She looked at him without love, asking him who he was, and he answered that he was Gunnar, and that he had earned her for his wife by riding through the flames. She knew not how to answer him, except by murmuring that she thought Sigurd alone could have done that, and Sigurd was her betrothed already. She consented to marry him only to keep her word, and sadly she consented. When he had given her a ring and she had given him back the ring of the curse, he left her, and, returning to his proper shape, he told Gunnar what had happened. Brynhild was to come soon to King Giuki's court. On her way she told her foster-father the news :

'The man rode through the fire and said that he came a-wooing, and his name was Gunnar ; and I said that only Sigurd could have done this, and that I had been betrothed to Sigurd before and loved him.'

Her foster-father said :

'What must be must be.'

Next she went to her father Budli's castle, and Budli accompanied her to Giuki's court with Atli, his son. They had a great welcome, and Brynhild married Gunnar. And now in some way it came to pass that Sigurd remembered Brynhild, how he had loved her and

sworn to be hers. He said no word of this to any man, but only to Gudrun.

One day Brynhild and Gudrun were bathing together in the broad river, and Brynhild swam far out beyond Gudrun. So when she came back Gudrun asked her :

‘ Why didst thou swim out beyond me ? Was it a boast ? ’

‘ I meant nothing by it,’ said Brynhild, ‘ though maybe I am the better swimmer to-day.’

‘ Thou mayst well boast of swimming, for thou hast nothing else to boast of.’

‘ I do not boast, yet the fact is I have much to boast of, if I wished. My father is a more mighty king than thine. My husband also—*thy* brother—has done greater deeds than thine. He rode through the flaming hedge, but thy Sigurd was once thrall to King Hialprek.’

‘ Thou art alone in speaking thus of Sigurd. Thou knowest better than any one that it is not true. He slew Fafnir. He rode through the flames to thee once, as well thou knowest. What is more, he rode through the flames a second time, which thou didst not know, and here is the proof of it.’

So saying, Gudrun showed her the ring of the curse. Brynhild went white as death at sight of the ring, nor could she speak for the thoughts that came into her mind.

Day after day Brynhild went sadly about, and Gudrun pitied her. She asked Sigurd if she should go to Brynhild, but though he said ‘ No ’ she went. She told Brynhild that she was sorry for what she had said in the river. Yet as soon as Brynhild spoke her mind Gudrun lost her temper, taunting her, and telling her that she had been cast off by Sigurd.

••• Brynhild was no better for these words. Her sadness

made her ill, and she took to her bed. For a long time she would not answer Gunnar when he asked her what was the matter. But being questioned over and over again, she said at last :

‘ Where is the ring I gave thee ? . . . No, do not trouble to answer, lest thou mightest lie as already thou hast done. Alas ! I also have lied. For I promised to wed the man who could ride through the flames to me, which only Sigurd could do. Yet he is not my husband, though he rode twice through the flames, but thou art, who dared not come through them once. I have broken my vow that I would marry only the noblest man alive. But I will be the death of thee, Gunnar, and I will reward well thy mother Grimhild.’

She would have slain him, if Hogni, his brother, had not seized her and fettered her. But Gunnar would not have her kept in fetters, hoping that if she were free she would recover and live her life with him as before. She read his thoughts, for she cried :

‘ It will not profit thee to loose me. Thou wilt never again see me glad in the hall, or drinking wine, or playing at chess, or joining in cheerful talk, or embroidering, or sharing thy counsels. Thou didst take away Sigurd from me and put thyself in his place.’

She destroyed her needlework, and she cried aloud so that every one could hear her and many could not help weeping with her. Then her room became silent ; no one saw her or heard her for several days. Gudrun inquired after her, and she was told that Brynhild was lying quite still and silent, and was neither eating nor drinking. She bade Gunnar go to his wife, but he would not, for he knew that he was not wanted. Hogni consented to go, and got not a word from Brynhild. Then all prayed Sigurd to go to her. At first he said nothing,

for he knew Brynhild was in a brooding fury against him. But in the end he went at the request of Gudrun. Seeing Brynhild, as he supposed, asleep, he cried :

‘Awake, Brynhild ! come out into the sun and cast off this dreaminess and grief.’

She turned quickly round and looked at him, with these words :

‘And does even Sigurd dare to come and look at me ?’

‘Why,’ he asked, ‘why wilt thou not speak to any one ? what is the use ?’

‘I will not hide my anger from thee,’ she said.

‘Thou art under a spell,’ he answered, ‘if thou thinkest that I have any evil intention against thee. Besides, thou hast the husband thou didst choose.’

‘Do not say such things. Thou knowest that Gunnar never rode through the flames to me. Even at the time I wondered, for I saw that the man had thine eyes.’

‘Yet there are no better men than Giuki’s sons.’

‘They did not slay Fafnir, nor ride through the fire for my sake.’

‘But I am not thy husband.’

‘Nor has Gunnar my love.’

‘Yet he deserves it. But tell me what is the cause of thy anger now, for these things are past and cannot be changed.’

For a moment Brynhild paused. Then she said fiercely :

‘What angers me most now is that I have not yet seen the sword red with thy blood, Sigurd.’

‘Oh, Brynhild, then I shall soon take away thy anger, if my heart’s blood can do it. Yet I think thou wilt not profit much by that, for thou wilt not live long after I am dead.’

‘I care not for thy life or thy death.’

'Then live, and love King Gunnar and me also, and I will do all that I can. To change the past I am powerless. I also have sorrowed for it, but until now I was thinking that sorrow had ceased, and I was beginning to be glad that at least Brynhild was not far off. Yet even now, if it please thee, I will put away Gudrun and wed thee, rather than let thee die.'

As he spoke these words his breast so heaved with sorrow that the rings of his corslet were snapped. But Brynhild said :

'I will not have thee, nor any man.'

Thus Sigurd left her, for no more could he say.

Outside he met Gunnar, who asked him whether Brynhild could speak. 'Yes, she can speak,' he answered.

When Gunnar came to her room she was crying out : 'I am loveless, husbandless, soulless.' To Gunnar she said :

'Gunnar, thou wilt lose me and all that I have. I will go back home again, and I will sit and dream my life out alone if thou wilt not do what I ask.'

'What is that?'

'Kill Sigurd. He has been talking to Gudrun. Listen. Sigurd, or Gunnar, or Brynhild must die. Thou shalt choose.'

For a long time Gunnar went about thinking sadly. He did not want to lose Brynhild and her dowry, or to kill Sigurd. He would have liked to have Sigurd's treasure ; on the other hand, he had sworn brotherhood with Sigurd. At the end of the day he was thinking exactly as he had done at the beginning, so he consulted Hogni, his brother. Hogni was no more willing than Gunnar to break his oath with Sigurd. He blamed Brynhild. For he guessed that she had egged on her husband, in her jealousy of Gudrun. Presently Gunnar

said that their young brother, Guttorm, might do the deed, since he had never sworn brotherhood with Sigurd. So they offered Guttorm great rewards and honours, and to make all sure they gave him a dish of the flesh of a wolf and a snake. Sure enough, Guttorm grew very eager to use his sword. He went in to Sigurd in the very early morning, but finding him with his eyes open, staring at something, he slipped out in alarm. A second time he failed in the same way. But the third time the bright eyes were closed, and Guttorm thrust his sword clean through into the bed below. He had his reward immediately. Sigurd rose up in the pangs of death and threw his sword Gram at the murderer, cutting him in two. The hero's blood awoke Gudrun, and sharper than the sword were her sighs. He tried to comfort her :

'Our son is alive,' he said, 'and as to my enemies, they have done themselves little good. It was Brynhild's plot. She persuaded Gunnar, yet I never harmed him.'

He could speak no more, and in a little while Gudrun knew that he was dead. One shriek, that made the cups rattle on the wall and the geese scream in the yard, was all the sound she made. She did not cry or wring her hands, but she sat still and near to death. Wise men came to lighten her heavy heart, but could not. The women tried to comfort her by recalling their own sorrows : how they had lost husbands—one of them had lost five husbands—sisters, brothers, and children ; how they had been insulted and taken captive and left alone. Still Gudrun could not weep beside the bed. It was Goldbrand, Gunnar's sister, who thought of a way. She uncovered Sigurd's body, letting the sheet fall on the ground close to Gudrun's feet, which made Gudrun lift her eyes. At the sight of the breast and the sword-hole, the hair dripping with blood, the keen eyes dead,

she fell upon the pillow with cheeks reddened and tears trickling like mist drops in a wood.


'The love of ye two,' said Goldbrand, 'is the greatest I ever saw upon earth. Thou couldst never rest, my sister, indoors or out, except at Sigurd's side.'

The women praised Sigurd, for his strength, for his courage, for his beauty, for his great deeds, and for his generosity; and Gudrun raised her head to say:

'There was no one like him. None. It was my brothers' fault that he died, but they shall not gain by it. O that Sigurd had never ridden with them to Brynhild's castle!'

Brynhild knew the moment of Sigurd's death by Gudrun's loud shriek. When she heard that shriek she laughed once, but only once.

Gunnar did not like the whiteness of her face. 'Not for joy thou laughest, Brynhild,' said he, 'nor for anything good.'

'Oh, well done, Gunnar. Thou hast slain Sigurd in his bed, or at least one has done it for thee. I wish thee joy of thy deed, since thou hast slain the keen king. It is well for thee he is dead, who would have ruled everything as he chose if he had lived much longer. He was the only man that ever I loved. When I saw him sitting with his treasure on Grani's back I loved him. Gunnar, thine eyes are like an old man's. They are not like Sigurd's, nor is there any part of thee equal to Sigurd. He was Gudrun's husband, but now he is not, and no one can forbid me to love him. He spoke truly, I think, when he said that I should not live long  his death.'

With these words and much weeping, Brynhild sank down. Fearing that she would take her own life, Gunnar put his arms round her neck; but suddenly she

grew strong and cast him off, nor would she let any one else come near her. Gunnar called Hogni to advise him how to save Brynhild from herself. 'Let no man save her,' said Hogni, 'she has done nothing but evil, and never will.' She was silent now, dealing out her treasures to the bondmaids and women of the house. She kept back a golden mail-coat and put it on, and then, when no one was expecting it, she thrust herself through with a sword. What treasures were still left she dealt out among the women as she lay bleeding. Then she began to speak to the men in the hall, and chiefly to Gunnar :

'Will ye listen to me now that I am almost dead? For it is a strange custom among men to listen to men when they have perchance lost half their wit in the pangs of death, rather than when they are alive and strong in every way. I can tell ye things that I think ye do not know. Gunnar will be friendly again with Gudrun ere long. Gudrun shall bear a child called Swanhild, as beautiful as the light of the sun. Gudrun shall marry a second husband, my brother Atli, but against her will. Thou, Gunnar, wilt desire to wed my sister Ordrun, but Atli will not permit it, and will cast thee into a pit of snakes. Gudrun shall slay Atli. She shall oftentimes wish before the end that she had done as I have done now. A third time she shall marry, to King Jonakr, and bear him sons. As for Swanhild, the last of Sigurd's race, she shall be trodden under by horses.

'Now grant me this one boon. Make a broad funeral pyre on the plain, big enough for all of us who are going to die with Sigurd. Deck it with shields and red cloths from Gaul. Burn me on one side of Sigurd, and my bondmaids, decked with necklaces, on the other. Put two menservants at our feet and two at our head, with my nurse, my fosterer, and two horses, two hounds, and

two hawks. Lay a sharp sword between us two. We shall be a goodly company yonder. I can say no more.'

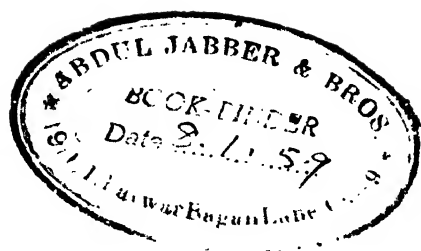
Thus Brynhild died and was burnt on the pyre with Sigurd.

Gudrun went out into the forest alone. The wolves howled, and she wished that they would make an end of her. But she wandered unharmed until she came after many days to a hospitable hall. Long she lived with Thora, the King of Denmark's daughter, embroidering pictures of battles, and especially the deeds of Sigurd, and his warriors with swords and helmets, and his ships with gilt figure-heads and carved bows. At last this life came to an end. Three kings courted her, but she refused them and their gifts. Then her mother Grimhild, with a cold and bitter drink, persuaded her to appease Atli, Brynhild's brother, by marrying him, though she hated him and foresaw that he would one day be the death of her brothers. Gudrun warned them, but so it turned out, as Brynhild also had prophesied. Gunnar came wooing Atli's sister Ordrun against his will, and Atli made this an excuse to slay both Gunnar and Hogni. With them the treasure of Fafnir was lost, which Atli had hoped to gain. The brothers had buried it in the Rhine, and no one but they knew the place, nor ever did know thereafter. Gudrun did not leave them unavenged. She slew her own children, Atli's children. She gave Atli wine to drink that was mingled with their blood, and when he was drunk with it she slew him and burnt down his hall with every one and everything in it. She had only Swanhild left, and to save her she married King Jonakr the Hun. For some time they lived in peace. Swanhild married Ermanarik, King of the Goths; Gudrun bore sons to Jonakr. Then news came that Ermanarik had

caused Swanhild to be trodden to death by horses because of a story against her. Gudrun urged the three sons of Jonakr to revenge their sister. She herself chose their helmets and mail-coats. They shook out their cloaks, fastened on their swords, and leapt angrily on to their horses. They rode over the wet mountains foaming with rage, to certain death. On the way they quarrelled, and one was killed, but the other two rode on.

Ermanarik was in his hall, smiling with wine and stroking his brown beard, and smiling all the more because he had heard that the brothers were coming. They burst in and began to slay, and Ermanarik only smiled, because the wine made him unable to do anything else. He laughed aloud, crying: 'Cannot a thousand Goths kill or bind two lone men in our hall?' But no sword would cut the sons of Jonakr on that day, and they slew all that opposed them, and they cut off the king's hands and feet. Then came into the hall an old man, very tall and one-eyed, telling the Goths not to use cutting weapons, but stones. So they threw stones until the brothers were killed. Thus Gudrun was left alone. It was not long before a funeral pile was made for her. In her last hours she called out for Sigurd to come on his white horse, bidding him remember what they had promised one another when they were first wedded, that Sigurd should come to her out of Hell even, if she called him, and that she should go down to Hell to him if he called her. 'Pile up the oak-branches,' she cried; 'let the pile stand high. May my sorrow-laden breast burn, may the flames make all clean again, and in them may my sorrow melt away.'

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